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ABSTRACT

This document presents findings of a study that tracked the development of a shared decision-making project in a Florida county school system since its inception in 1989. The impetus for the Shared Decision-Making Project came not from school stakeholders, but from the interplay of national reports, regional problems, state legislation, and local events. This document presents findings from the case studies of three participating schools, which included a middle school in an affluent neighborhood, an elementary school, and a progressive middle school. In each case, the study describes the culture of the school, specify the objectives the school set for itself, discuss the stumbling blocks that impeded progress toward those objectives, analyze achievements, and detail what difference shared decision making (SDM) made for the school and its stakeholders. In two schools, shared decision making became well established and stakeholders began to move toward school restructuring. The third school was still struggling to discover what shared decision making was and what the stakeholders wanted to accomplish through shared governance. Preliminary findings show that SDM/school restructuring success was affected by a complex interplay of 15 contextual factors, which fall into the following four broader categories: (1) shared governance and process; (2) vision and change; (3) collegiality and inclusion; and (4) communication and training. One table is included. Appendices contain the 1991-92 SDM/Focus 2000 goals, actions and strategies; and a definition of SDM. Contains 66 references. (LMI)

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Building Blocks and Stumbling Blocks

Three Case Studies of Shared Decision Making and School Restructuring

Elizabeth Bondy
Karen Kilgore
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Rodman Webb

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Elizabeth Bondy
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June 1994

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Introduction

When Susan Prosser, director of Program Evaluation for the Live Oak County School District,[1] called me in August 1989, school-based revolution was not on her mind. She used none of the warrior lingo found in *A Nation at Risk* (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and did not mention any of that document's get-tough, top-down, school-improvement suggestions.[2] Nor did she mention teacher empowerment, workplace democracy, or total quality control, phrases that gained currency in education after the publication of *A Nation Prepared* (Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). She did not discuss the rising academic achievement of German and Japanese students, the real-income decline for American workers in the 1980s, or the extreme demands that a global economy has placed on American businesses, topics that have troubled American economists of late. Instead, Prosser had a straightforward request: "Would the R & D Center for School Improvement at the University of Florida submit a proposal to evaluate a shared decision-making pilot project in the Live Oak County school system?" Three years would pass before we would begin to appreciate the revolutionary potential of the project and the complexity of what Prosser was asking us to do.

During our conversation, Prosser explained that the Live Oak Teachers Union[3] and the county school board were putting the finishing touches on a new contract. The agreement included a plan to establish shared decision making in ten pilot schools. If the project worked well, the parties would consider expanding it to more schools in the future. Both the district and the union wanted to proceed slowly and to evaluate the project as it developed. "Standard evaluation procedures don't make a lot of sense in this project," Prosser commented. She continued,

> No one here can define exactly what shared decision making is at this point or what it will look like when it is in place. It will be difficult for us to tell if the project is working because we don't yet have clear objectives. The union-based agreement only mentions general goals: improving student achievement and professionalizing teaching. It will take time for schools to define those goals and figure out how we can measure them. In the meantime, we need to know what's going on.

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[1]We have changed the name of the county we studied in this research to protect the anonymity of participants. We have also changed the name of the county personnel we interviewed in the course of the study.

[2]One example of militaristic hyperbole: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinkable, unilateral educational disarmament" (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 23).

[3]An American Federation of Teachers affiliate.

Prosser was one of a loosely knit group of like-minded administrators whom colleagues described as "school-centered," "people-oriented," "progressive," "innovative," and "politically astute." They liked ideas, worked well together, and gave teachers and principals the impression that they were more interested in schools and the demands of education than in the school system and the demands of bureaucracy. Members of this group worked in several departments and did not think of themselves as a group. Nevertheless, they formed what one school principal called a "humane subculture in a system that [some believe is] hopelessly bureaucratic."

Prosser knew before she called the R & D Center that I would be interested in Live Oak's Shared Decision-Making Project. In *Making a Difference* (1986), Patricia Ashton and I had noted how resistant schools had become to mandated reform. Real change, we suggested, would have to be site-based, teacher-driven, and systemic. We called for "ecological reform experiments" designed to change the roles traditionally played by teachers, administrators, and researchers. The Live Oak Shared Decision-Making Project had potential to become just the kind of ecological reform experiment Ashton and I had envisioned. By the end of our conversation, I agreed to bring Prosser's request to my colleagues at the center. Within a few weeks we had written a multiyear formative evaluation proposal that, in due course, the district accepted.

Method

During our initial interviews in 1990, neither district nor union personnel were willing to predict what shared decision making would look like in Live Oak County. "Every school will have to figure out what shared decision making means for them," said one union official. "We want to bring teachers in on the decision-making process, but we don't have a blueprint for how that should be done." Even project enthusiasts preferred to talk in general terms. They described shared decision making (SDM) as a process rather than a product, cyclical rather than linear, collaborative rather than imposed, and evolutionary rather than static.

The Center for School Improvement staff[4] has tracked the development of the Shared Decision-Making Project since its inception in 1989. In the fall of that year, we assigned one or two researchers to each of six pilot SDM schools. In the fall of 1991, eight additional schools were added to the SDM project. We assigned researchers to three of these "second-tier schools." Research team members conducted ethnographic interviews at their assigned schools, collected archival material, analyzed data, and wrote twice-yearly status reports. At the end of each year the team analyzed data from all SDM research schools and submitted a year-end status report to the School Board and the Live Oak Teachers Union. By

[4]Project researchers included Patricia Ashton, Elizabeth Bondy, Margaret Johnson, Karen Kilgore, Linda Ledbetter, Janet McNellis, Karri-Anne Nolan, Dorene Ross, Anne Seraphine, Stephen Schmitz, William Smith, Audrey Taylor, and Rodman Webb.

the end of three years, the research team had completed over 735 interviews. The average interview was 25 minutes long, but some lasted 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were audiotape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Like shared decision making itself, our methods were nonlinear and process-sensitive. In our reports, we documented achievements, identified stumbling blocks, clarified our emerging analyses, and made suggestions. Stakeholders read our reports, corrected our mistakes, discussed our analyses, and often acted on our suggestions. Administrators and union officials responsible for the SDM Project read our year-end status reports. Our findings were also considered by district and union personnel who planned ongoing training for first-tier schools and introductory training for second-tier schools.

Shared decision making is a site-based reform effort, but the impetus for the program did not spring from school stakeholders. A coincidence of national reports, regional problems, state legislation, and local events brought the Shared Decision-Making Project into being in Live Oak County.

The National and State Context for the Live Oak SDM Project

Shared decision making in public education grew slowly in the 1980s. The first wave of educational reform reports -- those that appeared early in the decade after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) -- focused the nation's attention on public education and rallied support for educational reform. Although the early reports were extravagant in their criticism of public education, they offered only modest school-improvement proposals. The second wave of reform reports -- those that appeared later in the decade after the publication of *A Nation Prepared* (Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986) -- focused attention on the organizational structures of schools and the bureaucratic systems in which they were nested (Webb and Sherman, 1989). The authors of second-wave reports discussed the quality of worklife in schools and the kind of education students need to prepare them for the twenty-first century. How politicians, unions, school boards, and school districts responded to first- and second-wave reports is an important part of the SDM story.

The First Wave of Educational Reform

Top-Down Reform. In the early 1980s, various national commissions issued a blizzard of reports, each claiming more emphatically than the last that the American educational system was in dangerous decline. The first and in many ways the most significant of these reports was *A Nation at Risk* (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Within a year of its publication, state legislators passed a series of reforms designed

to increase student achievement.[5] These reforms added requirements, but they did not significantly change classroom practices or the organizational arrangements of the schools. New regulations included stricter graduation requirements, discipline procedures, and attendance policies; tougher teacher certification requirements; longer school days and school years; and greater reliance on achievement testing.

Legislated Learning in the South. Even before the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, state legislatures in the South had turned their attention to educational reform. For two decades the region's economy had benefited from space and defense spending and from a steady migration of northern businesses to southern states. The downturn in the national economy in the late 1970s proved that continued economic growth in sun-belt states was tenuous. The very conditions that had lured industry to the South in the 1960s and 1970s -- a low-wage work force, lax environmental laws, fewer regulations, and a strong right-to-work tradition -- began to draw U.S. companies overseas in the 1980s. Past practices would not secure the region's economic future.

A Nation at Risk. This publication hit a responsive chord in the South, and sun-belt legislatures moved quickly to implement its suggestions. Legislators understood that the region's economy was changing, though there was some debate over the nature of that change. There was agreement, however, on three points:

- Southern students' poor academic performance put the region at a competitive disadvantage.

- Education reform would be at the center of each state's long-range economic growth plans.

- School-improvement legislation would have to be in place before the states could significantly increase spending for public schools.

Top-Down School Reform in Florida. Florida was a leader in educational reform legislation in the 1980s. Within months of the publication of *A Nation At Risk*, the state passed the Raising Achievement in Secondary Education (RAISE) bill. The legislation imposed a standardized grading system on all Florida schools, gave districts the option of

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[5]For a detailed discussion of the educational reform movement in the 1980s see the chapter "Revising Education: Multiple Calls for Educational Change" in Rodman B. Webb and Robert R. Sherman, ***Schooling and Society*** (New York: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 557-558. Thirty-five states changed high school graduation requirements, eight lengthened the school day, 21 proposed revising textbooks and other instructional materials, ten implemented statewide testing programs, and 12 others expanded existing minimum-competency exams (***The Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education*** [Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 1984]). See also M. E. Goertz (1986), ***State Educational Standards: A 50 State Survey*** (Educational Testing Service, No. RR-86-2).

adding a period to the school day, and required that students complete 24 credits[6] and pass a minimum-competency test before graduation from high school. Other legislation established testing programs for new teachers, an alternative teacher certification program, and the "Performance Measurement System," which state officials said would enable school administrators to determine the effectiveness of any and all Florida teachers.

The public welcomed the state's reforms, but many educators, district administrators, union officials, and business leaders were skeptical. They argued that the patchwork reforms only dressed up an educational system that had significant structural problems. Critics called for the fundamental restructuring of public schools. They argued that if schools could not be changed in dramatic ways, today's students would not be prepared for tomorrow's economy.

Teacher Organizations, Collective Bargaining, and the First Wave of Reform Reports

Teacher organizations have gained strength in the United States because they have increased teachers' pay and improved their benefits. Although these are important achievements, teachers' concerns extend far beyond dollars and fringes. Teachers are also interested in the quality of American education, the well-being of their students, and the character of their own work lives. Members told union officials to address these broader issues through collective bargaining. Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), discussed what teachers hoped could be accomplished at the bargaining table:

> We started out believing that if we put enough power . . . we could do almost anything on behalf of [teachers] and to improve the nation's schools. Very early we found . . . it is hard to use collective bargaining to improve [schools]. Management said, "Look, you wanted to be a union and you wanted collective bargaining. You represent your members, you don't represent the children. We'll [negotiate] all the narrow, self-interest issues that are usual in private sector bargaining. You can't talk for students, however, because they didn't hire you and the public didn't elect you." Traditional bargaining . . . turned out to be much narrower than our purposes.[7]

Gary D. Watts, senior director of the National Education Association (NEA), made a similar point:

> It's ironic that our critics accuse us of being interested only in salary issues.

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[6]Four of these credits had to be in English, three in mathematics, three in social studies, and three in science.

[7]A conversation between Albert Shanker and Rod Webb, May 10, 1990, in the national offices of the American Federation of Teachers in Washington, DC.

> That's not our history. We have always been interested in breaking down the bureaucracy, changing the way education was structured, and having a voice in professional concerns. We just haven't been able to do all these things through bargaining alone.[8]

By the early 1980s, officials in both the AFT and the NEA were looking for opportunities to broaden the scope of union/management negotiations. They were worried about the quality of American schools and wanted to include teachers in the diagnosis of school problems and the design of reform solutions.[9]

A Nation at Risk (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and the other first-wave reports that followed it into print caught the unions off guard. These reports were scathingly critical of American schools and often of teachers. Union officials believed (and some studies confirmed[10]) that the reports had exaggerated the nation's student achievement decline. The legislation many states passed in response to the first-wave reports, union officials noted, left teachers out of the school-reform debate. Reform legislation dictated that school improvement would be micromanaged by state departments of education. Union officials were wary of more top-down reforms. As Gary Watts told us,

> The trouble with *A Nation at Risk* is not its assessment that [America's] schools are in trouble; they are. There is no question about that. The problem is that it offered only top-down change. It offers more of the same. It said, "Add three more credits of this subject, add another hour on the day, add some more days on the year, and put more emphasis on this and that and the other." Students have changed, families have changed, the economy has changed, and schools are going to have to change, too. But the changes can't be small, they have to be fundamental. We have to restructure the schools.[11]

The unions' initial response to the reform reports was uniformly negative. As fast as the reform reports came into print, union officials issued harsh rebuttals. Albert Shanker told us, "I took some very good shots at those reports. That didn't last long, however. I began to

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[8]A conversation between Gary D. Watts, senior director of the National Education Association, and Rod Webb, May 11, 1990, in the national NEA offices in Washington, DC.

[9]Not all union officials agreed that the union should get involved in quality-of-worklife issues. Some officials, especially union organizers, believed that adversarial bargaining was at the heart of union work. They were wary of plans that emphasized cooperation over conflict because, traditionally, conflict had been every union's greatest organizing tool.

[10]See Dan Koretz, ***Trends in Educational Achievement*** (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, 1986); and ***Educational Achievement: Explanations and Implications of Recent Trends*** (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, 1987).

[11]Conversation between Watts and Webb.

change my view." After considerable reflection, Shanker began to see merit, if not in the reports' conclusions, at least in their authors' intentions. A discussion of public education was long overdue, and Shanker believed teachers had something to contribute to that discussion. He reexamined the reports and concluded that

> none of [them] recommended privatization [or] abandoning the public school system, something the Reagan administration supported at the time. [The report authors] were sounding the alarm. [They said] something was wrong [in education], and they were certainly correct. . . . They wanted to do something about it, but they didn't know what to do. . . . They were not from inside [public education]. How could they know? [The report authors were] trying to help us and we had to respond to that offer. [Their recommendations] were not cast in stone. Public-sector and private-sector people were saying, "We want to help; we want to improve the institution." If we knocked every one [of their suggestions], we would drive them to those who want to privatize the public schools. They would say, "The whole system just stinks. The unions, the school boards, the administrators, are all basically the same. They are protecting their own turf and do not really care about changing things for the better."
>
> I came to the conclusion that something very big was at stake. I was scheduled to give a speech [to a union group and] decided to say, "Look, these people are friends. We have to be willing to sit down with them. We have to put everything on the table [and] be open to the issues they put on the table."[12]

During the 1960s and 1970s the economic and social needs of the nation had changed quickly, but, many claimed, schools had not kept pace. "It's not that the schools were once good and suddenly got bad," Gary Watts told us. "The world changed and the schools didn't."[13] U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (1991) made the same point in a book on the changing world economy: "The fact is that most schools had not changed for the worse; they simply had not changed for the better" (p. 226). While American students were progressing at their usual pace, pupils in other industrialized nations were moving faster and moving ahead. America had not noticed that the very nature of the economic race had changed. Two economists, Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker (1992), made the point forcefully:

> Educators were right. On balance, the performance of the system had not deteriorated in anything like the measure that the reformers claimed; in fact, it had changed little over the decades. But that was . . . the problem. The requirements the world was placing on school graduates were dramatically

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[12]Conversation between Shanker and Webb.

[13]Conversation between Watts and Webb.

higher, but performance had stayed the same (p. 79).

If the United States is to compete in the next century's global economy, Marshall and Tucker concluded, today's students will have to become the best-educated pupils in the world. Improving student achievement will not be easy and will not be accomplished through top-down, business-as-usual reforms. The transformation of schools, like the transformation of the economy, will require organizational restructuring.[14]

The Second Wave of Reform Reports and the Demands of a Changing Economy

The Call for Structural Reform. In 1986, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy released *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). The report presented a blueprint for restructuring public education in America. Second-wave reports reminded Americans that their schools were designed to prepare students to work in a high-volume, tightly bureaucratized, smokestack economy characterized by standardized production and pyramidal management structures. Such an economy needed armies of disciplined workers able to adapt to predictable work routines. For two thirds of this century the nation's schools worked well; they produced a small percentage of well-educated students destined for management and a mass of marginally educated students destined to run the machines. Schools, Robert Reich (1991) pointed out, were designed on a factory model:

> The only prerequisites for most jobs were an ability to comprehend simple oral and written directives and sufficient self-control to implement them. Thus did American grammar schools and high schools mirror the system of mass production. Children moved from grade to grade through a preplanned sequence of standard subjects, as if on factory conveyor belts. At each stage, certain facts were poured into their heads. Children with the greater capacity to absorb facts, and with the most submissive demeanor, were placed on a rapid track; those with the least capacity for retention and self-discipline, on the slowest. Most children ended up on a conveyor belt of medium speed. Standardized tests were routinely administered at certain checkpoints . . . to measure how many of the facts had stuck . . . and "product defects" were taken off the line and returned for retooling. As in the mass-production system, discipline and order were emphasized above all else (p. 60).

The school/factory similarity did not stop there. Like successful business people,

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[14]Recent studies show that American children may stack up better against their foreign counterparts than was claimed in most Reagan-era reports (Smith, 1993). It is still clear, however, that academic achievement must improve, especially for non-college-bound graduates, if the American economy is to grow and if American workers are to have high-wage jobs.

educators equated growth with efficiency and efficiency with success (Callahan, 1962). It is not surprising, therefore, that schools and school districts grew larger and increasingly bureaucratic. Teachers in schools, like line workers in factories, were given little decision-making power. Administrators expected them to follow plans, methods, and schedules designed by specialists, explained by trainers, and enforced by management. The army of managers in school systems grew as administrators kept teachers under closer scrutiny. Today, the teacher-student ratio in many school systems is larger than the administrator-teacher ratio.

By the early 1980s, economists had documented significant changes in the U.S. economy. America was moving from a high-volume, mass-production, smokestack national economy to a high-value, service-oriented, global economy. The second wave of reform reports took these changes into account. Their authors concluded that schools would have to be redesigned if they were to prepare students for life and work in the twenty-first century.

Breaking the Factory Model in Industry and Education. Economists argued that American businesses must restructure if the American economy is to grow. That work began in the 1980s and continues today. Fewer business leaders preach that managers are paid to think and workers are paid to follow orders. Managers of the nation's most successful businesses understand that an intelligent, informed, problem-solving work force gives a company a significant advantage over its competitors.

The authors of *A Nation Prepared* reasoned that factory-model schools could not prepare students to work in twenty-first century organizations. They offered an ambitious model for improving schools. They called on states to increase teacher qualifications, promote participatory management, and heighten teacher accountability. Teachers' pay should be increased as they demonstrate increased competence, work collegially, and accept greater responsibility. Avenues of promotion should be opened within the profession so that teachers could advance without having to leave the classroom. Soon after the publication of *A Nation Prepared*, the recommendations contained therein were endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers. A short time later, the National Education Association offered its own strong, if qualified, support.

Preparing Students for the Twenty-First Century. In 1990, the nation's governors issued a report entitled *Educating America*. The report spelled out an agenda for educational change. "To achieve the new national goals," the governors said, "[America] must invent a new education system" (Task Force on Education, 1990, p. 12). The new school system, they continued, would be performance-based and focus on prevention. It would attract talented teachers, increase their professional responsibilities, hold them accountable for results, and reward them for good performance. The new school system would also provide meaningful choices to students and parents.

The nation's agenda for educational reform changed significantly between 1983 when *A Nation at Risk* was published and 1986 when *A Nation Prepared* came into print. More

separated these publications than the pessimism and optimism reflected in their respective titles. Some of the differences between first-wave and second-wave reform approaches are listed in Table 1 on page 11.

The movement toward shared decision making and school restructuring has proceeded slowly but relentlessly since the publication of the second-wave reform reports. Even as second-wave reform suggestions were taking shape, programs were underway in Live Oak County schools that set the stage for the county's Shared Decision-Making Project. We turn now to a short history of SDM in Live Oak.

Setting the Stage: Shared Decision Making in Live Oak County

Programs that Prepared the Way for SDM in Live Oak County

In the 1980s, Live Oak County launched at least three programs that anticipated the second-wave educational reform proposals. These programs set the stage for the Shared Decision-Making Project. In 1985, for example, the district secured funding from the Florida State Department of Education to begin its School Improvement Leadership Program, a pilot project involving nine schools. A team from each school (usually the school principal and a teacher) received on-site training in problem identification, task ranking, and group dynamics. Schools in the project experimented with new staff-development and school-improvement designs. The project introduced schoolwide planning, teacher-administrator cooperation, and shared responsibility. It also legitimated site-based experimentation.

In 1987, the county launched the Teaming for Innovation Project. The program involved teachers in the design and implementation of innovative teaching methods. Teacher teams reviewed pertinent research, designed new ways to instruct and coach students, and tested and redesigned new teaching strategies, finally passing them on to other teachers. The Teaming for Innovation Project allowed teachers to identify classroom problems and design teaching strategies to overcome those problems.

The third program that set the stage for shared decision making in Live Oak County was Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. In 1986, the first Live Oak County school joined the Coalition, a national alliance of reform-oriented schools. Coalition schools are diverse, but they are united in their commitment to Coalition principles and staff-designed school reform. The Coalition stresses teacher professionalization and participatory management, values essential to shared decision making. Three other Live Oak schools soon joined the Coalition, and news of their collaborative efforts at school reform moved quickly across the county.

Table 1

A Comparison of the Reform Approaches Suggested in First-Wave and Second-Wave Reform Reports

First-Wave Reports *A Nation at Risk*	Second-Wave Reports *A Nation Prepared* and *Educating America*
• Students are not achieving to previous standards. We must restore lost standards.	• Students are doing about as well as in the past but past standards will not prepare students for future jobs. We must set new standards.
• Schools are fundamentally sound and only minor improvements are needed. We must make minor reforms.	• Schools must be restructured if we hope to significantly improve student performance. We must radically restructure public education.
• Professional educators caused the achievement decline. To improve education, we must devise teacher-proof curricula and micro-manage reform from the top.	• The achievement decline may have been exaggerated, but school improvement is still essential. Professional educators, parents, and other interested parties are a valuable resource. To improve education, we must involve many groups, redesign schools, and increase academic achievement.
• Reforms will succeed if they are confined to the school. We must concentrate on improving teaching.	• Reforms will succeed only if they address problems that reach far beyond the school. States must work to improve such things as child health care and adult literacy.
• Equity and excellence are in competition. We must concentrate on excellence even if it means that we pay less attention to equity issues.	• The nation can and must achieve both excellence and equity in public education. We must work to insure that schools achieve both excellence and equity.

Sources of SDM Support in Live Oak County

District personnel learned important lessons from the School Improvement Leadership Program, the Teaming for Innovation Project, and the Coalition of Essential Schools. A few school board members and central administrators learned that shared governance was an effective management strategy and that site-level planning was an effective way to improve schools. Human resource trainers discovered that school stakeholders could work collaboratively to identify problems and forge solutions to the problems they identified. Innovative principals learned that teacher morale and organizational effectiveness improved when teachers took part in decisions that affected their work. Union officials and central administrators looked for areas in which they could work together to improve the quality of the work place and the performance of students. These lessons prepared the way for union-management discussions about shared decision making in Live Oak County.

A coincidence of events led to Live Oak's Shared Decision-Making Project. Thomas Green won a seat on the Live Oak County School Board in 1986, the year the Carnegie Commission published *A Nation Prepared*. Mr. Green, an experienced classroom teacher, had made teacher empowerment an issue in his campaign. Albert Coster, president of the Live Oak Teachers Union, had learned about shared decision making from the national office of the American Federation of Teachers; from discussions with teachers from SDM schools in Dade County, Florida; and from reading the growing literature on shared governance and school restructuring. The unofficial group of school-focused administrators to which Dr. Prosser belonged had read and informally discussed the literature on participatory management, school improvement, and effective schools. They had kept up with trends in organizational development and management training. Long before the Shared Decision-Making Project was launched, these individuals had initiated county training in problem identification, group problem solving, group processes, and effective time management.

No single event triggered shared decision making in Live Oak and no single person championed its adoption; support for SDM existed at many levels of the school system and union in 1989. When the idea of a pilot project was raised by Green, Coster, and Evans (the associate superintendent), each was enthusiastic and knew enough about the topic to understand what the others were suggesting. There already was enough support on the school board, in the school-oriented group in the central administration, and among union officials to make informal SDM discussions productive and, perhaps, inevitable. Top administrators were not enthusiastic about the project but were willing to go along after the union agreed that the program would be "revenue neutral"; that is, project schools would receive no additional funding to support shared decision making.

Initiating Shared Decision Making and School Restructuring in Live Oak County

Formal discussion of SDM began during contract negotiations in May 1989.[15] Participants quickly agreed to separate the SDM dialogue from the more strained negotiations over salary and working conditions. The negotiators appointed a group to discuss shared decision making in the relative calm of a "side committee."[16] That committee worked quickly and, in June 1989, produced the two-page Memorandum of Understanding. The memorandum spelled out how the Live Oak County Shared Decision-Making Project would be established. The school board approved the memorandum guidelines in June 1989.

The Memorandum of Understanding directed the superintendent of schools and the Live Oak Teachers Union president to establish the Shared Decision-Making Steering Committee to oversee the SDM project. The committee included eight members from management (two associate superintendents, three directors, and three principals), eight union representatives (all teachers), two parents, and a school board member. The Memorandum of Understanding charged the steering committee with several responsibilities: selecting pilot schools, overseeing in-service training, reviewing schools' SDM plans, and evaluating the program. The committee began meeting in July and over the next two months established operating procedures. Members agreed that the committee should model the spirit of cooperation and collegiality they believed would be essential for SDM success. Accordingly, the committee agreed that it would make all decisions by consensus rather than majority vote.

The district held an SDM information meeting for interested schools on November 3, 1989. During the meeting, a board member, the associate superintendent, and a union official explained the SDM Project to interested school personnel. One hundred ten people attended and brought information back to their schools for further discussion. Schools wanting to join the project submitted applications to the SDM Steering Committee in early December. To be considered, at least two-thirds of a school's faculty had to vote in favor of joining the project. Schools also had to specify on their applications how the faculty voted, why school personnel wanted to participate in the project, why they thought they were ready for shared decision making, and the school's commitment to the goals and philosophy of SDM.

Tier-One Schools

The steering committee selected ten pilot schools (three elementary, three middle, three high, and one special school) to participate in the first tier of the SDM project. The committee considered readiness criteria, the quality of each school's application, the degree of

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[15]Informal discussions had gone on for a year or more before the topic of shared decision making was brought up at the negotiating table. People in the union, in management, and on the Live Oak County School Board were aware of what was happening in Rochester, New York, and Dade County, Florida. Many thought Live Oak was ready to take a leading role in the school restructuring movement.

[16]The group was formally called the Joint Labor-Management Committee.

teacher support, the school's history of union/management cooperation, and other factors in determining which schools would participate in the project. The decisions were not easy but consensus was reached.

In January 1990, a school principal and a teacher were named co-facilitators of the SDM Project. The union and management agreed that co-directors would direct the project because they believed cooperative management would strengthen the project and because co-directors would symbolize union/management cooperation. The district applied for and received a grant from a regional business to support SDM training and the salary of the union SDM coordinator. In February, the project was formally launched at a kick-off dinner. Three speakers addressed the audience: Richard Kirby, superintendent of Live Oak County Schools; Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers; and David Smith, dean of the College of Education, University of Florida.

On February 14 and 15, 1990, the district and union conducted a two-day training session for representatives (core groups) from SDM Project schools. Each core group included a principal, a union steward, and a third person, usually another teacher from the school. The training team conducted five additional days of core-group training before school let out in June.

During the year, each school developed an SDM implementation plan and in June submitted it to the steering committee for approval. Between January and June, SDM schools developed governance structures, communications systems, and a working definition of shared decision making. They identified problems they hoped to solve through SDM and set long- and short-term SDM goals. The district appointed a volunteer "coach" to help each tier-one school.[17] At some schools coaches facilitated meetings, provided an outsider's view on troublesome issues, and helped schools identify and overcome stumbling blocks. Some coaches worked closely with the university researcher assigned to his or her school.

Tier-Two Schools

In May 1990, the SDM Steering Committee approved the addition of eight new schools (five elementary, two middle, and one high school) to the Shared Decision-Making Project. The steering committee used the same criteria for selecting tier-two schools that it had used in first-tier schools. Committee members paid special attention to factors that might indicate readiness for the SDM Project: a history of teacher/administrator cooperation and a tradition of innovation and SDM-like activities.

[17]A dozen district-level people volunteered to add SDM coaching to their already full agenda of duties. At some schools the work of these volunteers proved essential to SDM success. The coaches' commitment tells us something about the degree of support SDM philosophy enjoyed among some district-level personnel. Many of the coaches were members of the school-centered administration group to which Dr. Prosser belonged.

The Formative Evaluation

The University of Florida's formative evaluation of shared decision making in Live Oak County Schools was still in progress after three years. The case studies included in this report were completed in the fall of 1992. These case studies are site-specific and detail the complexities of shared decision making as it developed in each of three schools. An analysis of data from the six tier-one schools and the three tier-two schools revealed several commonalities that, though still preliminary, are worth reviewing here. Where relevant, we refer to other research that supports our findings.

Impediments to SDM Success

Until recently, little was known about how to successfully implement shared decision making and school restructuring (SR). A growing body of research, however, suggests that SDM and SR are extremely difficult innovations (Collins and Hanson, 1991; Elenbogen and Hiestand, 1989; Gomez, 1989; Jenni and Mauriel, 1990; Malen and Ogawa, 1988; Purkey, 1990; Strusinski, 1991). Most of the schools we studied were organized in ways that inhibited change. Although the majority of Live Oak teachers held master's degrees and considered themselves career professionals, their formal role in school governance had changed little since the beginning of this century. In fact, bureaucratic controls over teachers increased in the 1970s and early 1980s (McNeil, 1986; Wise, 1979). As a result, more and more Live Oak Teachers, like their counterparts in other parts of the country, felt they were losing connection with their schools, their students, their colleagues, and their profession (Ashton and Webb, 1986). What Sizer (1984) said of teachers in general, we found to be true in Live Oak County:

> Teachers are rarely consulted, much less given significant authority, over the rules and regulations governing the life of their school; these usually come from "downtown." Rarely do they have any influence over who their immediate colleagues will be; again "downtown" decides. . . . Teaching often lacks a sense of ownership, a sense among the teachers working together that the school is theirs, and its future and their reputations are indistinguishable (p. 184).

A few teacher-involvement projects in Live Oak set the stage for shared decision making, but they did not significantly alter the traditional roles teachers played in highly bureaucratic school systems. Indeed, teachers have become so accustomed to their subordinate roles that many actively resist change (Goodlad, 1975; Sarason, 1982). The teachers we interviewed looked and sounded a lot like teachers in other parts of the country. Most felt isolated from their colleagues (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989); unsure that they were making a difference (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989); wary of interference from parents, principals, and fellow teachers (McPherson, 1972; Webb and Ashton, 1987); oppressed by top-down authority structures (Malen and Ogawa, 1988; Sizer, 1984); constrained by bureaucratic requirements (McNeil,

1986; Webb and Sherman, 1989); confused by a seemingly endless array of innovations imposed from distant experts (Wirth, 1983, 1991; Wise, 1979); driven by an ethic of short-term practicality (Connell, 1985; Hargreaves, 1984); confused by the micropolitics of the school (Ball, 1987); and tired of a school culture that discouraged risk taking, de-skilled teachers, and inhibited collective reflection (Sarason, 1990). Given this formidable list of impediments, it is little wonder that shared decision-making and school restructuring projects take time to get under way and even longer to yield measurable results. Even when a school enters shared decision making in a high state of readiness (it has a history of shared governance, well-established trust levels, and strong faculty support for restructuring), it takes a minimum of three years for a school faculty to establish a working governance structure, learn to work together, identify significant problems, and plan and implement significant change (MacPhail-Wilcox, Forbes, and Parramore, 1990).

Preliminary Findings

Our work in Live Oak schools suggests that SDM/SR success is affected by a complex interplay of 15 contextual factors. These factors fall into four broad and interrelated categories:

- *Shared Governance and Process:* the governance structure works efficiently and is led by a principal who understands SDM/SR, keeps it moving, and is able to share power.

- *Vision and Change:* the school culture is guided by a shared understanding of SDM/SR, a common vision, and norms that support change and risk taking.

- *Collegiality and Inclusion*: the SDM/SR process encourages participation, trust, collective problem solving, and mutual responsibility.

- *Communication and Training*: the SDM/SR process encourages open communication, shared information, and effective training.

Below we list the factors we believe are associated with successful shared decision making and school restructuring. We have organized the factors under the four headings we described above. As you review the factors, keep in mind that we are not providing an SDM "to-do" list. Instead, we are identifying key elements in the shared decision-making/school-restructuring process. Each element is connected to every other element on the list. Each element is constructed by school stakeholders and, once constructed, must be maintained and frequently adjusted by the group. Together, the factors we list form the minimal elements of a shared decision-making school culture.

Shared Governance and Process. Successful SDM schools are likely to have

- democratic governance structures (Duke, Showers, and Imber, 1980; Foster, 1986a, Rizvi, 1989). Successful SDM/SR schools build inclusive and open governance

structures. Stakeholders believe their interests are represented and that their concerns will be heard. Systems are established to ensure that information is shared, that many opinions are heard, that discussions are open, that no one feels intimidated or left out, and that disputes will be settled through reason.

• shared, proactive leadership (Aronstein, Marlow and Desiltets, 1990; Fay, 1990; Foster, 1986a). In successful SDM/SR schools administrators actively work to establish shared decision making and make it work. They share power and responsibility. Stakeholders cooperate to improve the quality of education offered students, and administrators help keep shared decision making and school restructuring focused on this goal.

Vision and Change. Stakeholders in successful SDM schools are likely to

• share an understanding of shared decision making and school restructuring. In successful SDM/SR schools stakeholders collectively construct a common understanding of shared decision making and school restructuring.

• share a clear school-restructuring vision that includes improving the academic and social development of all children (Comer, 1989). In successful SDM/SR schools decisions are guided by a collectively constructed vision of the future. Stakeholders know the kind of school they want to create. Individually and collectively they work to see the school through students' eyes, to understand how children learn, and what they are really learning.

• develop risk-taking norms that support innovation (MacPhail-Wilcox, Forbes, and Parramore, 1990). Personnel in successful SDM/SR schools are willing to take risks. They understand that failure is a necessary part of success. They learn from failure and build toward success.

• develop norms of innovation and optimism (Little, 1982). Stakeholders in successful SDM/SR schools believe that change is normal, possible, and desirable. They work together at developing better ways to reach and teach their students.

• promote significant role change among teachers, administrators, and other members of the school community (Chapman and Boyd, 1986; Mutchler and Duttweiler, 1990). In successful SDM/SR schools traditional roles change over time. As stakeholders gain decision-making power and new responsibilities, they begin to define their roles in broader, more inclusive terms.

Collegiality and Inclusion. Successful SDM schools are likely to

• develop norms of collegiality (Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989). Personnel in successful SDM/SR schools learn to work together. They take responsibility for identifying school problems, proposing and perfecting solutions, measuring results, and

modifying plans when necessary.

• establish trust (Mutchler and Duttweiler, 1990). Stakeholders in successful SDM/SR schools trust one another. They understand that change will bring conflict, but believe that the best solutions are developed when people work through conflict to solve school problems.

• develop norms that empower others to share in decision making and to take responsibility for the decisions they make (Metz, 1978; Zeichner and Tabachnick, 1983). Stakeholders in successful SDM/SR schools have the opportunity to make policy decisions and fashion programs. They study the consequences of their actions and make adjustments as needed.

• nurture the collective intelligence of the school community. In successful SDM/SR schools stakeholders work together to improve the quality of the school. Better decisions are usually made when suggestions are pulled from many sources and those closest to problems devise and implement solutions.

• include a variety of voices in school-improvement discussions (Chapman and Boyd, 1986; Foster, 1986a). Successful SDM/SR schools are characterized by inclusion rather than exclusion. Such schools find ways to include in decision-making deliberations not only teachers and administrators but also support personnel, parents, students, and members of the business community.

Communication and Training. Successful SDM schools are likely to

• maintain open communication among all stakeholders (Foster, 1986a). Open communication is the life blood of successful SDM. Stakeholders not only must know what is going on in the school, they must have easy access to council members and believe that colleagues and administrators will listen to their concerns. In successful SDM/SR schools disagreements are tolerated and compromises are struck.

• institute effective training in shared decision making and school restructuring. In successful SDM schools all stakeholders -- not just SDM/SR council members -- receive training in shared decision making and school restructuring. Introductory training explains SDM/SR, introduces possible governance structures, and explains SDM/SR procedures. New teachers and staff members receive introductory training each year. Developmental training includes trust building, conflict resolution, running effective meetings, and informational issues such as budgeting, scheduling, and current regulations. Implementation training provides the information teachers need to break old paradigms and develop new curricular, instructional, and developmental approaches to teaching.

Another factor appears essential to the success of shared decision making and school restructuring. Our research suggests and other studies confirm that SDM will succeed in

direct proportion to the understanding, support, recognition, and encouragement the project receives from the school board, central administration, and middle management. Projects in districts where upper management understands and supports shared governance appear to move more quickly toward successful school restructuring than those in districts where support and understanding are low. SDM projects are likely to fail if support from the top wavers, where understanding of SDM/SR is limited, and where there is not a solid commitment at the top to making SDM succeed. Good decision making at the bottom of an organization depends on effective leadership at the top of the organization (Elmore and Associates, 1990).

Three Case Studies

Writing case studies is something of a balancing act. Authors must provide enough detail to convey the texture of the story, but they must not tell so much that they risk losing their readers in the minute particulars of the case. Authors must convey the character of individual acts and actors, but they must tell their story in a way that reveals the evolving culture of the institution. Authors must not only identify the events and people that make a particular school unique, but they must highlight those characteristics that can be generalized to all schools attempting to restructure themselves through shared governance.

The case studies included here tell three stories of shared decision making. In each case, the authors describe the culture of a particular school, specify the objectives the school set for itself, discuss the stumbling blocks that impeded progress toward those objectives, analyze achievements, and detail what difference shared decision making has made for the school and school stakeholders. In two schools, shared decision making is now well established and stakeholders are moving toward school restructuring. The third school is still struggling to discover what shared decision making is and what stakeholders want to accomplish through shared governance. The stories are tales in progress. The last chapter, "Has School Restructuring Benefited Live Oak Students?" has yet to be written.

Blue Lake Middle School and the Dynamics of School Reform

Karen L. Kilgore and Rodman B. Webb

School Context

The School, Students, Neighborhood, Faculty, Parents

Blue Lake Middle School is set in an affluent neighborhood in the northwest corner of Live Oak County. It is one of three middle schools serving the city of Laketon. The school is large and continues to grow. During the first year of the project the school enrolled approximately 1,600 students. The subsequent two years of the project, an additional 200 students were enrolled each year, bringing the enrollment to 2,000 students. Additional portable buildings were moved onto the campus, joining numerous older portables already in use. Although crowded, the school is well maintained and well equipped.

Blue Lake has a population of high-achieving students whose parents support high academic standards. The parents are vocal, supportive, and active members of the school community. Similar to many other schools in south Florida, Blue Lake has a growing population of Hispanic pupils as well as students of other ethnic groups. Eleven percent of the students are African-Americans, most of whom are bused to Blue Lake from other neighborhoods in the county.

In 1988, a new principal was assigned to Blue Lake Middle School. A dynamic, articulate leader, she was committed to educational innovation. During her administration she recruited many new teachers, significantly changing the composition of the faculty. Blue Lake teachers were energetic and had a strong sense of professionalism. The school received a national award for educational excellence for the 1991-1992 academic year.

Readiness for Shared Decision Making

Blue Lake Middle School joined the Shared Decision Making (SDM) Project in a high state of readiness. The school had a history of faculty involvement in decision making. Faculty members voiced their concerns and needs through such committees as the Management Council, the Curriculum Council, and the Faculty Council. The Coalition of Essential Schools Committee had also formulated plans to restructure the school according to Coalition principles.

The Blue Lake faculty was involved in several innovative programs. In one of these, the Teams Project, teachers taught one another a variety of instructional strategies. The program included demonstrations and encouraged teachers to observe in one another's classes. This project reduced teacher isolation, opened classrooms, and facilitated teachers' talking to one another about teaching. As one faculty member explained, "People are willing to share their . . . ideas. They're not protective. The doors are open in the halls." Another program eliminated tracking and mainstreamed special education students into regular classes. Teachers in these projects frequently discussed teaching, learning, and the structure of school programs.

When the SDM project was introduced to Blue Lake Middle School in 1989, the principal was developing open, trusting relationships with the faculty. She was available to teachers, listened to their concerns, and discussed their ideas. According to the faculty,

> The principal doesn't say, "This is how it will be done." She asks questions, "How would you solve this problem?" The principal treats us the way . . . teachers should treat students.
>
> [The principal's] door is always open. I'm not afraid to ask to do something. She doesn't say "no." She'll say, "Tell me more about it." She'll constantly get you thinking.
>
> The principal . . . trusts the faculty to do their jobs and make responsible decisions.

The openness between the principal and faculty members had expanded to include an openness among the faculty and other members of the administrative staff.

> This is really different from other schools. I have found that the principal, the other faculty, and the department heads listen and respond to you . . . . People here listen; what you have to say really matters.
>
> I feel free to say what is on my mind. [I do] not have to worry about any kind of negative consequences, looking bad, or losing my job, or anything like that . . . . I feel that I can be as creative as I want . . . . I've never felt like "That was a stupid idea," or "How could you come up with that?" There is a lot of encouragement.

The principal had established an environment "where it's safe to try changes." The faculty, in response, expressed a willingness to change and an enthusiasm for innovation.

> Here [at Blue Lake] we talk; we talk about school and we get excited about it. And we go home and call each other on the phone and talk about school. It's the feeling you get from power, [from having] some say in what's going on. There is so much talent in so many schools that I've been in, and so much of it is wasted. But it's not [wasted] here.
>
> We are initiating lots of change. We are doing a lot of things . . . . I have an undying faith that [the principal] will keep things changing.

Blue Lake Middle School was "ready" for shared decision making. The faculty had a history of involvement in decision making, the school atmosphere supported change, and the administration and faculty had built a foundation of cooperation and trust.

SDM Restructuring Objectives: What Is the School Trying to Do?

How Did Shared Decision Making Begin? The First Two Years

At its inception, the faculty had expressed several expectations for SDM: better communication between faculty and administration, greater sense of ownership of school problems, increased faculty and staff cohesion, and higher teacher morale. The first step was to establish a governance structure and elect the Shared Decision-Making Council. During the following two years, the SDM Council met weekly, in the mornings before school. An SDM bulletin board and mailbox were established to keep the faculty informed. The council met in the library and meetings were open to all stakeholders.

Initially, the council dealt with "housekeeping" concerns such as access to photocopy machines, faculty club activities, improving discipline, and modifying guidance referral procedures. The SDM Council also examined organizational issues such as the school's administrative hierarchy. The council studied some fundamental questions: What do administrators do? What administrative work should involve teachers? Should teachers participate in budget decisions or in the hiring of teachers?

The roles and responsibilities of the SDM Council were unclear to council members and the general faculty. The relationship between the SDM Council and the other faculty committees was also confusing. Other committees had clearly defined roles and dealt with such issues as curriculum, instruction, and school policies and procedures. During the first year, the SDM Council worked to clarify its role. As a member of the council explained,

> We are trying to delineate what we, as the committee . . . are supposed to be doing. That is one of our weakest points, just knowing what our committee is supposed to be doing. So we are working with the faculty and with the parents . . . to delineate what we do in the school that is different than the other groups, the Curriculum Council, Management Council, and the Faculty Council.

Other school committees had representatives from specific constituencies (usually teams or departments). The committee members met regularly with their particular constituent groups and had well-established mechanisms for communicating with the faculty. The SDM Council, however, had been elected by popular vote from the entire faculty. It had to find ways to communicate with stakeholders and to encourage SDM involvement. The council asked such questions as: Whom do the members represent? Should members voice their own opinions or do they speak for some particular group? How are they to elicit faculty opinions concerning issues?

Consequently, the council spent most of the first and second years trying to delineate its role and to establish a clear sense of purpose. It worked to implement or improve projects planned before SDM. Several objectives were addressed:

- establishing a well-defined discipline plan involving conflict mediation and cooperative discipline
- eliminating tracking
- implementing a study skills program
- developing an integrated, outcome-based curriculum
- implementing flexible scheduling
- implementing staff-development programs to help faculty meet the objectives listed above

The council supported programs begun before SDM, but council members also wanted to play a more direct role in program development. These reform initiatives had been formulated in other committees and then funneled to the council for review and waiver requests. Members of the council, however, wanted it to be more than an adjunct to the restructuring movement. They wanted it to participate more fully in shaping the school's restructuring efforts.

At the end of the second year, many council members and administrators worried that committees were duplicating one another's efforts and that the role of the SDM Council was still unclear. This confusion was made worse by state accountability legislation directing that each school establish a School Improvement Team. It appeared that another committee would be formed and that its work would duplicate that of the SDM Council. With the consent of faculty, the council and the administration decided to make some changes. As the principal explained, members of the council and the administrative staff looked again at the school structure. They reassessed what types of decisions were made by whom and in what forum. According to the principal,

> We had difficulty . . . coming up with the proper place for the shared decision-making group within the framework . . . we already had in place. We already had other groups that were doing so much with different types of decision making.

From these stakeholder discussions, a role for the SDM Council began to emerge: It would serve an executive and coordinating function. As the chair of the council explained, the school began to see the SDM Council as the "group that [could] pull it all together." At the end of the second year, the council achieved a clear definition of its role: to deliberate issues related to restructuring and articulate a vision for the future. As a member explained, "the council is [finding] its own personality. [We will take] a visionary approach, look . . . down the road, [and decide] what we want Blue Lake to be."

The Third Year: Evolution of Governance Structure and Clarification of Aims

In the third year of the project, the SDM Council was revised and given a new name: the School Focus Team. Representatives from the other committees in the school were added to the team. The new committee would do the work of the state-mandated School Improvement Team. Elections were held to choose representatives. Several members of the SDM Council as well as the chair of the council were elected to the School Focus Team. The principal also became a member of the team. The previous chair of the SDM Council was elected to the chair of the School Focus Team. Five parents were elected from the PTA and the Parent Advisory Board. Thirty students, 10 from each grade level, were also selected to serve on the team.[18]

The third year of the project represented a departure from the previous two years. The first half of the year was devoted to reformulating the SDM Council into the School Focus Team. The second half was devoted to developing an effective working group and to formulating goals for the future.

The School Focus Team met every other week, in the evenings. Meetings were open to faculty, staff, students, and parents. An agenda was distributed prior to each meeting. The chair of the Focus Team and the principal developed and circulated a set of readings for members of the team.[19] Following the meeting, minutes were circulated to the faculty.

The School Focus Team established several priorities for the 1992-1993 academic year. The first goal was to collect and distribute information to guide restructuring efforts. The collection of information had a twofold purpose: (a) to provide detailed information concerning the school, and (b) to provide information concerning the process of reform in schools. To achieve the first purpose, the team distributed surveys to students and their parents. They also reviewed student test scores. To achieve the second purpose, the team reviewed educational literature and visited other schools that were implementing reforms. The School Focus Team also began working on plans to restructure the school.

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[18]Students were asked to volunteer for the group by writing an essay describing their reasons for joining. A committee of faculty members and guidance staff selected a cross-section of students for participation. In choosing student representatives, consideration was given to academic achievement, race, sex, and socioeconomic status. Members of the School Focus Team, assisted by the principal, familiarized the students with the school-improvement process through a daylong retreat.

[19]Readings for the first few meetings included articles concerning the process of change in schools, by authors such as Fullan (1991) and Hall and Hord (1987). The team also reviewed the status reports from the SDM Evaluation Project.

Changes Achieved Through SDM/Restructuring

Accomplishments

Over the first three years of SDM, the school began restructuring through the initiation of the following programs:

- the Teams Project, implementing innovative instructional strategies in the classroom
- flexible scheduling, providing for diverse schedules to meet the needs of instruction
- integrated, outcome-based curriculum, resulting in interdisciplinary thematic units

During the first two years of the SDM project, the SDM Council provided support and acquired the necessary waivers for implementation of these programs.

In the third year of the SDM Project, the School Focus Team helped develop a school-within-a-school program they called the House System. This system was designed to eliminate some of the problems associated with the school's rapid growth. The House System would

- reduce perceptions of overcrowding
- make the school environment more personal and friendly
- create a more pleasant, varied, and productive teaching atmosphere
- personalize instruction
- raise student achievement

During 1992-1993, the faculty and staff divided the school into four houses. Each house was designed to serve approximately 500 students from grades six, seven, and eight. Each house was staffed by an assistant principal, a guidance counselor, an instructional specialist, and an interdisciplinary team of teachers. Students stayed in the same house with the same staff for three years. Plans for the house system included peer assistance, multi-age grouping, outcome-based curriculum, and a flexible rotating-block schedule.

The Focus Team also began plans for the Parent Support Center, to include resources for parenting and to provide parent education courses. The first parent education class, taught by the school guidance staff, began in the spring of 1992 and involved approximately 50 parents.

Evolution of Governance Structure

During the first two years of its existence, the SDM Council aligned itself with the restructuring efforts that were under way in the school. Much of the discussion of the council during those first two years centered on ways to facilitate restructuring. The council viewed itself as a link between the school and the county, the mechanism through which the school could articulate its vision of school reform and request assistance to make that vision a reality. The reorganization of the council into the School Focus Team enabled the SDM movement to become a central force in the school by gathering strength from the preexisting committee structure and by furthering involvement of parents and students.

Evolution of Roles and Responsibilities

The evolution of shared decision making was accompanied by a related evolution of the roles and responsibilities of the faculty and the administrative staff. At Blue Lake, the traditional norms that isolate teachers and impede collaborative efforts (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) began evolving into new interaction patterns among teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

Faculty members assumed leadership roles (Fay, 1990; Foster, 1986b). Teachers began to bring up issues for discussion, to plan cooperatively for change, and to share in decisions affecting the school. As two teachers explained,

> Teachers are seeing themselves as decision makers in a lot of ways. We had shared decision making as a process before we had the Shared Decision Making Council. Shared decision making . . . is really a process and teachers are beginning to see themselves as people who are constantly initiating change.

> Shared decision making has definitely brought out leadership in the faculty. . . SDM has enabled the faculty to discuss issues and to brainstorm. At this school, faculty leaders are given a lot of support, a lot of positive feedback. You aren't criticized for taking initiative.

Teachers said SDM improved their relationships with administrators, citing the openness between the faculty and administration and praising the support the administration gave to shared decision making. Teachers' descriptions of administrative openness and faculty leadership opportunities were reminiscent of Foster's (1986b) view of democratic leadership. Teachers told us that

> New opportunities are always available for faculty. For the majority, there is a feeling of shared leadership. . . . It's no longer a power play. Now people see that [all] of us can be leaders. . . . It's rewarding to be involved in decisions that affect me, the kids, the community.

> Since SDM, faculty have become more confident, active, and vocal about school issues. All the decisions are made by teachers; we can do what we want to do.
>
> Our teachers have a lot of power; we can take the initiative. We receive a lot of support from the administration. We don't have to question whether or not we will be able to do something.
>
> Traditional molds are being broken. The principal is open: She shares ideas and communicates with faculty. . . . The faculty are open and share their expertise. Faculty are supportive of each other. We circle the wagons and shoot out, not in.

Mutchler and Duttweiler (1990) pointed out that teacher role change is difficult and unusual even in SDM schools. Nevertheless, teachers at Blue Lake Middle School reported that their roles had changed and that these changes affected the way they interacted with children.

> I think that when teachers feel empowered, they can empower the kids. They feel comfortable enough to give them a little more. And they feel how good it feels. I know how great it feels. And I know when I have an idea and I go to the principal and she says, "Great! What do you want to do?" You know how good that feels? And I've gone into my classes and done the same type of thing [with students].
>
> Teachers have an agenda: They want to come up with different ways to teach and be successful . . . which is what the whole idea of restructuring is.

A review of the literature indicates that most SDM schools successfully initiate "housekeeping" reforms that neaten school practices but few schools move on to consider substantial restructuring reform (David and Peterson, 1984; Rizvi, 1989; Rothstein, 1990). Teachers at Blue Lake, however, began to consider ways to improve teaching and learning, and the ideas they considered involved other teachers and administrators. Dialogue among teachers and administrators was aimed at improving student achievement, at doing "what's best for kids":

> [The principal] is very much into [figuring out] what's best for kids. She's progressive, always reading and synthesizing information. She knows that the system is failing now. She has a difficult role to play: facilitating change, not dictating it. She wants people to want to change for the better.

The principal at Blue Lake helped set the stage for discussions about school improvement and student achievement. She helped establish an environment conducive to risk taking by trusting the faculty and encouraging teachers to assume leadership roles

(Foster, 1986b; Lieberman, 1988a). She offered staff-development opportunities and provided resources for program development.

> The principal really encourages faculty leadership . . . . She gives encouragement, support for their ideas. Faculty get verbal and written recognition from the administration.

> [The principal] sends people to conferences. She treats people like professionals. She builds people's strengths . . . . She works on staff development; she lets teachers try innovative practices.

> Our principal makes leaders out of people . . . . If the principal is willing to share, then shared decision making happens in many different kinds of ways.

Parents also experienced role changes through involvement in the school-improvement process. The parents on the School Focus Team noted the differences between their previous interactions with faculty and their relationships with teachers on the School Focus Team.

> [At parent conferences] we would talk one on one about problems. There was always a sense of being hurried, never [having] enough time to talk. . . . I've learned a lot through [the SDM] process -- getting to know the staff and the teachers. It's adult talk about improving the school. Parents and teachers want this kind of involvement.

> We are all learning about each other. It's fascinating to sit around a table and hear each other's perspectives. I see a real openness developing.

Parents welcomed the opportunity for substantive dialogue with teachers and staff concerning school improvement issues.

Students were also involved in the school-improvement process. During a daylong retreat with members of the School Focus Team, students discussed the school day and specifically addressed issues that concerned them: the quality of the school lunches, the unclean state of the bathrooms, and the insufficient time allocated to moving between classes. Students were asked to offer improvement suggestions.

For the faculty and staff at Blue Lake, shared decision making came to mean sharing decisions with administrators, with teachers, with parents, and with students. Through SDM and restructuring, the roles of faculty, administrators, parents, and students became more collegial, open, trusting, and productive.

Barriers and/or Tensions That Have Impeded Progress

Several barriers to implementation of SDM were identified by faculty and staff from the beginning of the project. Through ongoing dialogue among faculty and administrators, many of these barriers were overcome; some remained.

Confusion: The Role of the Shared Decision-Making Council

The first two years of the program were marked by confusion. At its inception, many of the faculty and staff were unclear about the purposes of the SDM Project and their roles in the project. Most of the confusion centered on the role of the SDM Council. This confusion was not limited to the general faculty; many members of the committee were also confused as to how SDM could best facilitate school restructuring. It took a long time to figure out how to coordinate the work of the council with that of standing committees and the requirements of recent school-improvement legislation.

The SDM Council and the administration also were confused about their respective roles. That is, the support and assistance of administrators were essential to the success of SDM, yet the best means for providing that support were not always clear. Relationships between administrators and SDM Council sometimes were awkward. The roles and responsibilities of the SDM Council were subsequently clarified through numerous conversations among faculty and administrators.

These conversations occurred because teachers and administrators were dedicated to the success of the SDM Project. They analyzed the structure of the school and the process of decision making at Blue Lake. The faculty and staff gathered information from many sources: status reports of the SDM evaluation project, input from district administrators involved in SDM, and the literature concerning SDM and school change. By studying the school specifically and the general factors that influence school reform, the faculty were able to make productive changes in the structure and function of the SDM Council.

Communication

During the first few years of the project, the SDM initiative suffered from a common SDM problem: inadequate communication with the general faculty (Elenbogen and Hiestand, 1989; Lacey, 1977). Although most stakeholders supported SDM, many were ignorant of the council's activities. Ignorance fueled skepticism and anxiety concerning change.

The problems of communication were addressed in several ways: distribution of agendas prior to meetings, distribution of minutes following meetings, establishment of an SDM bulletin board, and allocation of a day of pre-planning to disseminate SDM information. Reorganization of the council clarified roles and goals and also improved communication. Members representing specific groups within the school reported the council's efforts directly to those groups and brought group reactions and ideas back to the council.

Insufficient Time

Throughout the project, faculty and administrators expressed concern about the lack of time for faculty participation in SDM activities. (A concern over time is widespread in SDM schools [Cistone, Fernandez, and Tornillo, 1989].) Meetings were scheduled either before the start or after the end of the school day. Teachers who participated in SDM meetings did so because of their commitment to the project and the intrinsic satisfaction that comes from being a part of the ongoing discussions concerning school improvement. Teachers who commuted long distances or who had family commitments, however, found it difficult to participate. Other teachers refused to participate after hours and expressed resentment that SDM was not given sufficient priority to make school-day meetings possible. The concerns about time were not limited to the hours taken up by SDM meetings. Stakeholders also needed time to research issues, to visit other schools, to attend conferences and workshops, and to discuss educational issues with one another.

The administration and the council attempted to overcome these obstacles. Faculty and administrative staff worked together to "cover classes" so that individual teachers could participate in SDM and restructuring activities. Additionally, the SDM Council asked for a waiver from the county to allow faculty four early-release days to discuss SDM. The waiver was refused by the district office. Although the issue of time was diminished through the efforts of the council and the administration, concerns over time remained.

Lack of District Commitment to Shared Decision Making

Teachers and administrators expressed reservations about the district's commitment to the SDM project. Inadequate district-level support has been shown in other research to be a significant impediment to change (Harrison, Killion, and Mitchell, 1989; Malen and Ogawa, 1988). As one Blue Lake teacher explained,

> As an institution, [the district] still passes down edicts. . . . I understand that there are certain things that they have to do. . . . But in one way they say we are school-based and in another they don't. And now, in this uncertain time when there are moneys involved and they are scared . . . they . . . control those dollars.

Stakeholder skepticism was intensified by the district's refusal to grant the release-time waiver request. The manner in which schools were informed of budget cuts also increased faculty and staff skepticism. Neither the administration nor the SDM Council was consulted concerning implementation of the budget cuts. Notices were sent from the district offices concerning positions and staff to be cut. Schools were also informed that school-based management was "on hold." Stakeholders' reservations concerning district support increased over the first three years of the SDM Project.

Instability Due to Budget Cuts

The budget cuts were a concern for everyone in the school. First- and second-year teachers were "surplused" and faculty from regional high schools were reassigned to Blue Lake. These cuts affected the morale both of people who lost their positions and of others who empathized with the plight of those "surplused." Stakeholders were also concerned that the instability in staffing could pose a serious obstacle to further restructuring. New faculty assigned to the school did not know the history of SDM at the school and might not support the project.

The Skeptics

Although many of the faculty were responsive to shared decision making, some remained skeptical. The skeptics viewed SDM as a means for faculty to inform the administration of their concerns but believed decisions would always be made by the administration. As one teacher explained, the relationship between the principal and the faculty is similar to that between a coach and his team: "There might be leadership on the team but someone is still responsible, someone still calls the shots, and that's the principal." The skeptics viewed the principal as the final decision maker, the person accountable to the county for what goes on in the school. They also had reservations concerning the district's commitment to SDM. In their view, the district should have provided release time so faculty and staff could participate in SDM meetings. They said the district should have paid salary supplements or reduced the course loads of council members. Many of the skeptics had philosophical reservations concerning restructuring. They believed that SDM and the changes it instigated were trendy but would have no lasting impact on student achievement. The skeptics preferred a more traditional approach to schooling that emphasized academics, strict discipline, and rigorous preparation for high school. The numbers of skeptics did not increase during the first three years of the project, nor did their ranks diminish. The skeptics did not believe that their criticisms had been heard or addressed.

Personal and Organizational Learning

For many on the Blue Lake faculty and administrative staff, the first three years of the SDM project were a time of reflection. They reassessed their professional roles and responsibilities, the organizational structure of schools, and the change process. The faculty and staff noted several aspects of SDM that were significant in making the project successful.

Self-Study

Self-study was an essential ingredient of school reform at Blue Lake. This is an interesting finding because few reports of school restructuring emphasize the importance of institutional reflection and analysis. Faculty and staff at Blue Lake continually asked

questions about the school and their respective roles in school improvement:

- What are the needs of our students? Our parents? Our faculty? Our staff?
- What do we want for our school, now and in the future?
- What's best for our kids? For each other?

As part of the self-study, the faculty and administrators analyzed the decision-making processes alive in the school:

- What decisions currently are being made?
- Who makes these decisions?
- By what process?
- When and where?
- How can the decision-making process be improved?

Discussing these questions helped the council develop a vision for the school and plan ways to achieve that vision. What was significant at Blue Lake was not only that these probing questions were being asked, but that they were discussed and answered communally.

Discussion required time and resources. Faculty and staff extended their already full days by arriving early, staying late, and coming in on the weekends to work together, attend workshops and conferences, and plan for the future.

Staff Development: The Process of Shared Decision Making

Through the SDM process, council members learned to communicate more effectively with other teachers, staff, parents, students, and one another. According to the Blue Lake stakeholders, the SDM process requires effective communication skills: the ability to be an active listener and to express one's views directly and positively without alienating others. The conditions at Blue Lake approached what Foster (1980), following Habermas (1979), referred to as an "ideal speech situation." Such situations occur, Foster explained, when stakeholders understand one another, share some assumptions, test claims against facts, trust one another's intentions, confront differences of opinion openly, and work toward common goals (1980, p. 505). As one Blue Lake teacher explained,

> I'm seeing teachers reaching an awareness of how to effect change, how to speak up for themselves, how to talk . . . even about things that other people don't like.

The Blue Lake faculty identified staff development as an important way for teachers to learn the skills needed for shared decision making.

The faculty and staff also noted the influential role of the principal in shared decision making. The principal must provide leadership, be receptive to faculty suggestions, and provide support for faculty initiatives. According to the faculty of Blue Lake the principal encouraged the kind of open conversation and communal problem solving Foster (1980, 1986b) said is essential to ideal communication:

> The principal has to be an educational leader. The principal cannot just be a business manager and a crisis manager. Leadership is the most important thing.
>
> The principal has to listen and to respond to the faculty. . . . Teachers [must] feel . . . they have input; the atmosphere [must be] conducive to discussion and [address the] concerns of the faculty.

The faculty and staff expressed the view that administrative training must be emphasized in shared decision-making projects to ensure the success of SDM endeavors.

Staff Development: Establishing a Knowledge Base for Reform

The faculty and administrative staff formed the foundation of their reform efforts from contemporary educational research, theory, and practice. That is, through the efforts of the Coalition Committee and the School Focus Team, information concerning school reform was gathered and disseminated to faculty and parents. Workshops and conferences were held at the school for the faculty; and some faculty were given opportunities to travel to conferences and to visit other schools. Reform discussions were stimulated and enhanced by what teachers and staff were reading, hearing, and seeing. These staff-development opportunities provided substance for dialogue, enabling participants to focus on issues rather than on personality conflicts. For SDM projects to be successful, Blue Lake teachers and staff learned that participants in the process need to be active learners, able to acquire information, to visit and observe other schools, to request technical assistance and inservice, and to help one another.

Lingering Concerns

During the three years discussed here, the faculty and staff of Blue Lake learned a great deal about the process of shared decision making. They discovered significant facets of school reform: the importance of self-stu[illegible] staff development for faculty and administrators; and the possibility of lea[illegible] ducators, researchers, and practitioners. The faculty and staff le[illegible] and error, by research and reflection, how to reach their goals for school improvement.

One concern, however, expressed by many at Blue Lake was the "dependence" of SDM and restructuring on particular individuals in both the administration and the faculty. Key questions were asked: Are sufficient faculty involved to maintain the momentum for reform in the event that the faculty leadership changes? What happens to reform if the principal leaves? Will faculty, parents, and staff have a role in choosing a new principal? Will stakeholders have a say in hiring new faculty members? Is the power of individual teachers a function of institutional changes in the governance structure? Have institutional structures been developed that ensure the continuance of SDM? Are restructuring efforts focused on "change for change's sake" or do these efforts specifically address student achievement? These are significant questions that needed to be addressed.

Ongoing discussions of the process of shared decision making, the aims of restructuring, and the impact of reform on students were essential to the continued success of SDM and restructuring at Blue Lake. Stakeholders had to continue their study of the school's organizational structure and work to strengthen the process of shared decision making. Such efforts also had to address the role of the district and the state department of education in supporting shared decision making and facilitating change.

Implementing Shared Decision Making at Brooksville Elementary School

Dorene D. Ross and Rodman B. Webb

This case study documents the efforts of administration, faculty, and staff of an elementary school to implement shared decision making (SDM). The study is based on 62 interviews conducted with 33 faculty, staff, and administrators at Brooksville Elementary School over a period of 22 months spanning three academic years. Most participants were interviewed twice and key participants three or more times. Fifty-one interviews were conducted at the school; 11 more were conducted by telephone. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to one hour but most were about 25 minutes long. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim except in six cases in which participants requested that the tape recorder be turned off and the interviews transcribed on a portable computer. These transcripts are close to verbatim. This case study grows from analysis of the 62 interviews and a collection of school and district documents.

Brooksville Elementary School is located in a relatively stable neighborhood in the southern part of Live Oak County. It is a small school by county standards with an enrollment of about 625 students. At the time of this study, the pupil population was representative of the county, with the majority coming from low-income families (but not living in poverty), and with 20 percent minority students. About half of the student population received free or reduced-price lunch. The school employed two administrators, 38 teachers, and 19 staff members. The majority of the teachers were white females; only eight percent were male, and 14 percent were minority (African-American or Hispanic).

Brooksville's effort to become a shared-decision-making school was difficult, but the school made impressive progress. Roles and relationships changed, innovation began, satisfaction with the status quo declined, and receptivity to change increased. The faculty was surprised and pleased by the relative success of SDM. At the beginning of the project, many believed it would fail because there was a recent history of faculty/administration friction at the school. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) visited Brooksville 29 times between 1986 and 1990 to deal with faculty complaints. Faculty morale was low, and all agreed that communication between administration and faculty was poor.

School Context

To some in the district, Brooksville seemed a less than optimal choice for a pilot SDM project because of the undercurrent of dissatisfaction at the school. The commitment of the principal, Ms. Baker, however, convinced the district SDM planning group to place a project at Brooksville. Nevertheless, people outside and inside the school openly wondered about its chances for success.

History of the School

Brooksville was built in the mid-1960s and has had only two principals: Mr. Olson, who opened the school and served for 20 years, and Ms. Baker, who was appointed in 1985. Veteran teachers reported that Mr. Olson gave them a great deal of autonomy, listened to their concerns, and brought many decisions to the faculty for discussion. They said that, under Mr. Olson, the school was a positive, caring, and nurturing place for children and

faculty. They said the school had a "family" atmosphere and that faculty turnover was low because teachers enjoyed working at Brooksville.

According to teachers who worked with both principals, Ms. Baker's style of leadership was based on power and authority whereas Mr. Olson's was based on respect for teachers and their judgment. They believed that Ms. Baker's first priority was to establish authority in the building, a task they believed was much harder for a woman than it might have been for a man. They noted that Ms. Baker was hard-working, ambitious, and motivated by high standards for teachers and children. The effect of her actions, however, was to lessen faculty autonomy. She was quick to issue orders and slow to solicit suggestions from her faculty. Before SDM, Ms. Baker occasionally asked for faculty input. However, some teachers believed she had made up her mind before asking for suggestions and structured an "input session" so that faculty would confirm what she had already decided. Many teachers doubted Ms. Baker would ever "give up her power." As one teacher noted, "Sometimes [Ms. Baker] wants you to think teachers have input but we don't really. She decides and then she guides people to make that decision."

During research interviews, many teachers reported that Ms. Baker would answer teacher complaints by saying, "If you aren't happy, go somewhere else," or "As long as the word principal is on my door, I make the decisions." When a teacher did something that Ms. Baker believed challenged her authority, she warned, "I don't get mad, I get even." In fact, Ms. Baker did get angry. Many teachers told stories of teachers who left Ms. Baker's office in tears after being "zapped" (harshly criticized) for disagreeing with her. Ms. Baker refused a faculty request to establish a faculty council or to put a suggestion box in the teachers' lounge.

Ms. Baker told a different story. The "laissez faire" leadership of her predecessor, she argued, provided no direction for the school. Serious problems (such as the alcoholism of one teacher) were ignored, and it fell to Ms. Baker to put the school on a more productive course. As a result, she reported that she had to terminate someone each year and she worked to improve the performance of others. She recognized that she intimidated some faculty members and that she had a "short fuse." She believed that teacher dissatisfaction was the price she had to pay for turning the school around. Some faculty members, notably those Ms. Baker hired, shared her perspective. Brooksville initiated the SDM project with significant communication problems, a high level of tension, disagreement over its past, and no common vision of its future.

Attitudes of the Faculty

There were two levels to faculty attitudes at Brooksville. On one level were faculty attitudes about teaching at Brooksville. Surface attitudes (having to do with teachers' daily interactions with children and with one another) were highly positive. On our first visit to Brooksville in early 1990, we were struck by the friendliness of the faculty. At any given time we found teachers talking in the lounge, hall, or library about everything from diets to graduate school to staff-development experiences. They shared information about individual children and discussed how to improve the school experiences of their students. We found

strong evidence of school cohesiveness and spirit. For example, on the day of student government elections, the faculty spoke with pride about the election posters, speeches, and real voting booths. On "school spirit" day, we felt out of place because we were not wearing the school's colors.

On the level of daily interaction, faculty attitudes at Brooksville were very positive. We were impressed by the school's strong family atmosphere. Teachers respected one another, spoke with pride about the school, and called it their "own." They did not want to leave.

During later visits to Brooksville, when we began to study the micropolitics of the school, we began to notice hidden tensions. As one faculty member put it, Brooksville was a "schizo place to work." At the beginning of the SDM project, these tensions fell into two interrelated categories, the first growing from the SDM project itself and the second from teachers' relationships with Ms. Baker.

At the beginning of the project, three groups of teachers had quite different perceptions of Ms. Baker and the potential success of the SDM project. The first, all newly hired teachers, liked the principal and were enthusiastic about SDM. The second group, mostly veteran faculty members, did not trust the principal and believed that SDM would fail. They believed that Ms. Baker jealously guarded her power and would never allow teachers to make significant decisions in the school. As one faculty member put it, "A zebra can't change its stripes no matter how often it says it wants to be a horse."

The perceptions of the third group were more moderate. The members of this group, like the first, were all hired by the current principal. Ms. Baker listened to these faculty members, attended to their suggestions and sometimes to their criticisms. Other teachers referred to this group as "the chosen." All members of "the chosen" were support (noninstructional) faculty.

Members of "the chosen" acknowledged that the principal's moods ran "hot and cold." They respected her educational ideas but said she had poor people skills. They believed Ms. Baker formed quick judgments about people and that her reactions were often based on her initial judgment rather than on a person's present behavior or ideas. Ideas or criticism Ms. Baker would accept from one of "the chosen" would get another faculty member into trouble. Even "the chosen," however, had felt Ms. Baker's temper. They said she did not realize that her behavior scared teachers, hurt their feelings, and discouraged trust. "The chosen" believed Ms. Baker meant well. They pointed out that when the consequences of her behavior were explained to her, she always apologized and quickly backed down. "The chosen" understood that Ms. Baker had very high standards. She wanted things done in particular ways but sometimes did not give clear directions. "The chosen" noted that Ms. Baker wanted the faculty to make decisions but often wanted the decisions to be the same as those she would have made. The result of the principal's retribution and inconsistency was that many people, even "the chosen," felt insecure.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these problems, teachers and administrators were hopeful that the SDM project would be good for the school, would improve trust and

communication, and would improve the educational experiences of students. The principal began with a sincere desire to make SDM work. And, although many faculty members were skeptical about the chances for success, all seemed sincerely interested in trying to make it work.

Sequence, Goals, and Process of Organizational Development

SDM did not begin at Brooksville with a clear set of goals. In fact, the story of SDM at Brooksville was the gradual development of coherence in the explicit goals of the project and the beginnings of a search for school vision. We emphasize, however, that the school struggled to reach another goal that had never been mentioned as an explicit part of the project, although individuals, at times, had mentioned its importance. This implicit goal, which involved the school's most significant accomplishment, was the faculty's and administration's gradual change in role definition. The gradual development of explicit goals and the emerging importance of roles and relationships within the school became apparent in the sequential development of the project.

Initiating the Project

Ms. Baker entered this project with enthusiasm and commitment. She recognized that there were problems at the school and hoped that SDM would help resolve them. One of the first SDM activities she suggested was bringing teachers together to share their concerns. She divided the faculty into three groups and met with each group to explain SDM and discuss past resentment and frustrations. Teachers said Ms. Baker was very open at the meetings and that she endured "a great deal of abuse." The meetings served to bring faculty concerns into the open and helped Ms. Baker see what faculty thought and felt.

Some faculty members felt Ms. Baker was courageous to call such meetings and believed they were a good start toward improving communication and trust at Brooksville. Others were more wary. They believed Ms. Baker divided the teachers into three groups so that she could control the meetings. Ms. Baker asked teachers not to talk about the meetings with colleagues until all the meetings had been held. She explained that she wanted to ensure that everyone got accurate information. Skeptical teachers believed the real reason for the secrecy directive was to limit faculty communication and keep Ms. Baker in control of information. Despite such skepticism, the meetings had a positive effect and Ms. Baker and her faculty struggled to determine their next steps in the project. The plan-act-reflect-replan pattern established early in the project would be used to guide the school through the first three years of shared decision making.

Early Efforts: Taking Steps to Define SDM

It is important to note that the district, in initiating the project, set forth few direct guidelines. District goals for SDM stressed the professionalization of teaching and raising student achievement. The district recommended that individual schools be creative in

approaching the SDM project and set forth few guidelines in order to allow each school maximum flexibility. Understandably, the Brooksville faculty were unclear about the meaning of SDM and the processes for implementation. Most early efforts were directed at clarifying ambiguity related to definition and implementation.

At the beginning of the project, faculty members saw increasing teacher involvement in decision making as the principal goal of the project. They hoped that faculty involvement would improve faculty/administration communication, faculty collaboration and teamwork, and children's achievement and attitudes toward school. Guided by high hopes and vague guidelines, the SDM core group (the principal and two teachers) and the group of grade chairs determined that the SDM Council would involve representatives of various groups (e.g., teachers, special class teachers, paraprofessionals, parents). Within each category, people were invited to volunteer and the first SDM Council was created.

For the first five months of the project, Ms. Baker, the SDM Council, and the Brooksville faculty struggled to define operating procedures for the council and goals for the project. By spring of the first year, they had developed operating procedures for the council, distributed SDM Council meeting minutes to foster open communication, established decision making by consensus within the council, and created a structure involving faculty committees and the SDM Council to develop plans to achieve school goals.

Additionally, the council planned a schoolwide needs-assessment meeting at which the entire faculty and staff worked (at a dinner meeting) to define goals for the school. At this meeting, four explicit goals for SDM were identified.

- to better manage student conduct
- to better meet the needs of at-risk students who do not qualify for special programs
- to involve parents in their children's educational progress
- to make the curriculum more fun and relevant for the students

Almost all faculty and staff members attended this meeting, and most felt the four goals that emerged were important. However, a few expressed concern that Ms. Baker ran the meeting and "rephrased" peoples' comments so that some concerns were never addressed. In particular, they were concerned that improvement in communication and trust within the school was not specified as an SDM goal. In our status report to the school, we suggested that a fifth, but as yet implicit, goal for SDM was to establish better communication and trust between teachers and administrators. In interviews, faculty members stressed that achieving this goal was essential if they were to feel free to take the risks necessary to confront the difficult instructional problems they faced. At issue, from their perspective, was whether Ms. Baker was willing to share decisions or simply wanted to maintain the illusion of an SDM project at her school. Thus, the first year of the project included little discussion or evidence of restructuring or innovation. "Sharing decisions" was the primary focus. The school made progress, however: A council had been created, procedures for decision making were in

place, explicit goals had been developed, and faculty consensus about the plan had been achieved.

Initial Steps at Implementation: The Storm before the Calm

In the second year of the project, Brooksville was experiencing heightened tension, decreased communication among faculty members, and decreased trust of Ms. Baker and "the chosen." Many faculty members were disillusioned, and trust was so low that over one-third of the respondents refused to allow their interviews to be taped for fear of repercussions. Five months of SDM procedures had made things significantly worse.

The group of skeptics in the school was growing larger, and many respondents reported that faculty members, even those on the Council, were unwilling to make decisions because they felt "threatened" and "intimidated." They noted that there was a growing split between "the chosen" and most other teachers. Most faculty members believed that SDM was not working and that the school was run by an ad hoc administrative group, hand-picked by Ms. Baker. Only some decisions were brought to the faculty and the SDM Council, and even these were sometimes overturned by Ms. Baker. Faculty were hesitant to make decisions and felt the project provided only the illusion of SDM. They did not feel free to express alternative viewpoints during council meetings or general faculty meetings. The following quote reflected the view of many faculty members:

> I'm disillusioned. Faculty are not willing to make decisions any more because we feel threatened and intimidated. When we do feel comfortable enough to make a comment or try a decision she is very critical if she doesn't like it. A lot of times she just blatantly says, "I won't support that." I don't even speak up at meetings any more. I'd just rather give it back to her and let her do it.

Teachers said the administration did not support risk taking and that faculty morale was low and declining, and, with it, support for the SDM project. In fact, many speculated that, if a faculty vote were taken, SDM would be voted out of the school.

Ms. Baker's perception was that the SDM Council and the faculty had begun making decisions necessary to run the school but that certain decisions she "just made," in part because of time pressures from the district. She believed that the faculty wanted to make decisions but did not consider the consequences of their decisions or assume responsibility for their implementation.

During this time, SDM "coaches" began working with all SDM schools. Coaches were volunteers from central office staff with an interest in the SDM project. Brenda Hazen was the coach assigned to Brooksville. Ms. Hazen worked with the council to try to improve communication and decision-making procedures. She also worked with Ms. Baker to help her see how the faculty perceived her actions. She knew Ms. Baker was committed to SDM and to the school and tried to help her see that some of her outbursts lowered faculty morale and endangered the program.

Despite these problems, most faculty members supported and respected Ms. Baker. Many understood that SDM put the principal in a difficult position. They noted that teachers wanted more freedom to experiment, to take risks, and even to fail. Yet, they acknowledged that such freedom for faculty might be impossible unless the district provided more freedom for building administrators to take risks and possibly fail. As one teacher said,

> People don't feel they are making decisions but really the principal is still the decision maker. She was trained to make decisions and it is hard to relinquish power, especially because if a decision fails, it will all fall on her.

Faculty understood and accepted administrative unwillingness to give up certain decisions, given the principal's accountability for the success of the school. They believed at this point, however, that the school had only an illusion of SDM. In talking about the problems in the school, faculty and Ms. Baker were now beginning to talk about necessary role changes for faculty and administration. Their ideas about the nature of such change, however, were vague, they had no idea how to bring about this change, and there was no explicit communication among the faculty members about the issues surrounding role changes.

Additionally, faculty believed SDM simply took too much time. Teachers acknowledged that the school was well on the way toward achieving the goals they had set for the project and was even breaking new ground. For example, faculty members were beginning to be involved in budget and personnel decisions. Teachers noted, however, that faculty work committees had always existed at this school and they did not believe that SDM had changed significantly faculty levels of involvement. One teacher said,

> It's not that much different than what we had before. We've always had committees that accomplished these kinds of things. We've always had input about the way the school is run, but now there is a decline in morale and communication.

SDM just made them more frustrated because they believed they "should" have more decision-making power. In fact, many reported a desire to return to pre-SDM days. Teachers noted that, although Ms. Baker had never been easy to work with, she had accomplished a lot in a short time. They were willing to accept her making the decisions. They were less willing to maintain the pretense that school decisions were being made by the faculty when, in their view, all decisions were being orchestrated in the front office.

Crisis Resolution: Reuniting a Divided Faculty

The next status report, written in February 1991, midway through the second academic year, described the tension, discontent, and lack of communication in the school. When the report was shared with Ms. Baker, the district moved quickly to provide encouragement and support. Brenda Hazen began attending most SDM Council meetings, and the council began work to clarify problematic issues such as when committees could act autonomously and when they required approval from the council or from the general faculty; the role of the general faculty in making decisions; whether the council required the approval of the principal

for action; what kinds of decisions the council (as opposed to the grade-chair group or Ms. Baker acting independently) should be making; and whether consensus from the council was required for action. At the same time, two of the four support faculty began to decrease their involvement in the SDM Project to try to reduce the split between teaching and nonteaching faculty in the school. Through most of the spring, the council grappled with these problems, but the faculty continued to feel left out of the decision-making process.

In May 1991 the school needed to develop the SDM plan for the next academic year. After polling the faculty, the SDM Council decided to hold two lengthy, whole-school, after-school dinner meetings to develop the plan. Almost all faculty members attended at least one of the meetings, which were led by an external facilitator (not Ms. Hazen). These meetings were a turning point for the school.

At the mid-May meetings, faculty and staff worked in small groups to identify problems and issues important for the next academic year. Within the groups, faculty and staff began to talk about the communication and trust problems that divided the school and threatened the project. Peer support encouraged some individuals to express the concerns of their small groups to the large group and the "subterranean" conflicts were brought to the surface and confronted. Throughout the meeting, faculty insisted that their procedures for governance and communication be made explicit. The external consultant tried to focus the group on the "task at hand," setting goals for the 1991-1992 year, but the faculty persisted. On the second day, Ms. Baker "took the meeting back" from the consultant, stating that her faculty wanted to deal with issues of governance. That action united Ms. Baker and her faculty and set them in a common direction.

Explicit Outcomes of the Mid-May Meetings. These meetings had positive results. First, the grade-chair group was eliminated and the membership of the council was changed to include grade chairs. Faculty agreed that the small stipend grade chairs had received in the past would now be divided among the members of the SDM Council. This action reduced conflict among competing committees and improved the council's communication with the faculty. Second, responsibilities for various decisions regarding budget, personnel, and students were clarified. Third, faculty members agreed to meet twice a month to improve SDM communication and broaden faculty involvement in school decisions. SDM Council agreed to post all council agendas in advance of the meetings so teachers would have a chance to attend meetings when the issues were important to them. The faculty also developed an explicit set of goals for the 1991-1992 academic year (see Appendix A). As goals or action strategies were added to the plan, all teachers and staff members were asked if they could support or at least "live with" the idea. Thus all goals and action strategies listed in the plan had the unanimous endorsement of faculty, administration, and staff.

Implicit Outcomes of the Mid-May Meetings. The meetings changed peoples' perceptions of the long-term goals of the SDM project. For the first time, teachers began to discuss SDM as a way to improve the education of children at Brooksville. Faculty talked for the first time about restructuring and what school restructuring meant to them. Faculty began to see that restructuring might mean

- redefining people's roles

- developing innovative ways for community, parents, teachers, and administration to work together to improve the school

- developing more daring and innovative instructional strategies

- developing nontraditional assessment strategies for students

- constantly reevaluating their teaching in order to promote change, growth, and improvement

In addition, faculty reported that, through SDM, Brooksville had begun to move toward restructuring. Many reported that the process was slow and that too little innovation had occurred. Almost everyone interviewed, however, indicated that Brooksville was moving toward restructuring and had the potential to increase the pace of change. The school's first steps toward restructuring included encouraging each teacher to try one innovative strategy for next year, changing the report card, and including teachers on committees to make hiring decisions. Experimentation with portfolio assessment by second-grade teachers (a goal for the following academic year) was cited as a big step toward restructuring. Teachers noted that first-step success might encourage other faculty members to experiment and that each new success would make the faculty more willing to take bolder steps in the future.

Teachers and Ms. Baker began to talk more clearly about changing faculty and administrative roles. Role and relationship changes had just begun, but the school community was thinking about the changes that were in process and others that were needed.

Teachers began to see that SDM principals had to be "objective leaders." Principals had to treat every idea with respect, hold their own emotions in check, and offer ideas collegially. SDM principals had to perform a difficult balancing act. They had to trust the SDM process. They had to trust that, with support and gentle prodding, teachers would get the job done. The process might take time and the product might not be what the principal (or faculty) initially envisioned. In the end, however, the product would be better and would enjoy faculty support. Teachers noted that administrators must work as SDM advocates at the district level to find ways around procedural regulations so teachers would be free to innovate.

The role of a faculty member also changes in an SDM school. Respondents noted that teachers must be able and willing to speak their minds, stand up for what they believe, give time to SDM, make collaborative decisions, and accept responsibility for their decisions. And respondents noted that faculty members must be able to step out of the frame of the individual classroom. They must be able to see the whole picture and to view the school as a unit. The following quotes from two different teachers demonstrate teachers' insights about their new roles.

> Under SDM you can't be an advocate for just your classroom or your grade level. It has to be global. You have to look at the whole school.

> I'm not just a teacher in a classroom but I am a member of an organization, a

company that helps to run the school. I'm not just alone in my room. I want to be involved in as much as I can. We are all learning what is going on and trying to develop something better.

These changes in role definition and relationships suggested that by May of the second year faculty and administrators had a much more complex view of SDM. They expressed the view that SDM meant faculty and administration were collectively responsible for making decisions and implementing actions that ran the school. They noted that accomplishing this meant working as a unit, taking the time to become involved in decisions about running the school, taking time to communicate with one another, accepting responsibility for their decisions and actions, and learning to trust and value one another.

The progress made between February and May was dramatic. Faculty attitudes shifted significantly. Every respondent noted that communication had improved and most said trust had improved as well. They said that there was more unity among the faculty members and more empathy for the administration, and that faculty felt much more included in SDM and more comfortable expressing dissenting opinions. Although some teachers still doubted that SDM would ever "really" work at Brooksville, most felt this group was small and less vocal. Most teachers supported SDM and teachers who had been "on the edges" were joining the effort. They were starting to express their ideas and to recognize that they must take action if they wished to influence the future of the school. Although problems in trust and communication were not completely resolved, the following excerpt captures the prevalent faculty view:

> People have become aware that they need to get involved or stop griping. They have the opportunity to go to meetings, to be heard and express their view. They can be as involved as they want. If they don't want to take time to get involved in the decision making, then they need not complain.

Most teachers said that SDM was making enduring changes in the school. They expected setbacks, but almost everyone believed an important threshold had been crossed. Faculty members believed their ideas would be considered. Most believed that severe communication problems would not recur. They said that teachers had learned to confront one another, to clarify rumors, and to speak out. They said these changes assured that open communication would continue. One teacher noted,

> [Communication] is an up and down issue but I can't imagine it going back to like it was before. Now we are confronting each other. People are speaking up. There really is communication and people are seeing everybody's perspective more. More people are trying to make it work.

Okay, It Works! Where Do We Go from Here?

By fall of 1991, the third academic year of the project, faculty members unanimously agreed that SDM processes and procedures were in place and working. They reported that the climate of the school continued to be positive, task-oriented, and open. They reported

that roles and relationships continued to change and improve. Faculty and staff had demonstrated a more global perspective, were more willing to speak their minds, and were more willing to stand up for what they believed. Respondents said that they had become more confident that they could suggest ideas and influence decisions. Teachers noted that some faculty members would never be able to see "beyond the classroom door," but that most of their colleagues had developed a more schoolwide perspective.

Respondents also described some role change on the part of Ms. Baker. The "I'm the boss" image was still apparent. However, the administration did solicit more faculty input, and Ms. Baker had begun to allow others to make decisions, as the following quote indicates.

> I see the principal coming to us more and conferring with us and making it seem as if she wants us to decide together, but there are times when it is solely her decision. Sometimes it is a matter of time. I understand that; it's not a problem. On important issues, we sit down together.

Teachers said Ms. Baker had become a more "objective" leader, although a few respondents still believed it was very difficult to suggest or implement ideas with which Ms. Baker disagreed. By fall of the third year, faculty members noted many accomplishments of SDM, such as initiation of portfolio assessments, development of a new dismissal plan, and teacher input into personnel and budget decisions. Concerns about the goal focus of the project were emerging, however. SDM procedures were established, were being used to make decisions within the school, and seemed to be understood by most respondents. As one noted, "We're into operation instead of laying ground rules." Additionally, teachers noted that the previous year's agreements about communication procedures were being kept and faculty communication with the council had improved. Agendas had been posted prior to meetings; reports about SDM activity had been made at general faculty meetings; many grade-level chairs were reporting SDM activity to their colleagues; and the SDM suggestion box was visible and was being used by faculty, staff, and parents. There had been lapses and times when information did not "get out." Teachers understood, however. They explained that "[we] are not used to being in an organization and doing things like reports at faculty meetings." Whenever these lapses were pointed out, however, the SDM Council acted to solve them. Thus, the level of trust among faculty and administration improved substantially, though problems remained.

Concern about the long-term goals of the project began to surface in the fall of 1991. Several teachers expressed concern that SDM had done little that was truly innovative. Teachers had solved some problems and settled into a routine. Teachers were concerned that SDM would do little more than promote "business as usual" at Brooksville. They worried that impetus for significant change and restructuring might be lost in the day-to-day running of the school. The following quotes represent teachers' concerns.

> It seems like now it has settled into routine meetings. It's almost like grade chair meetings used to be. We just discuss things and move on. It doesn't seem like major things are happening. We're into operation now instead of laying ground rules.

> It would be accurate to say that we are dealing with basic routines now. We are starting to discuss where we are in terms of our goals. . . . We are trying to do too many things. It would be useful to focus on a limited number of things.

> I can't really say that we have accomplished anything except setting up procedures, except the evening meetings where we spent time together and brainstormed. . . . I think the development of mutual respect and getting to know how others feel was broadening.

These concerns were expressed during November interviews after the school had been overenrolled for several months. In addition, a contract dispute led the union to suggest that teachers do no more than "work to the rules" of their contract. These two factors created a less-than-optimal context for SDM progress. Nevertheless, committees were created and held meetings, some curriculum and assessment innovation had begun, the SDM Council developed and implemented a plan to solve the overcrowding problem, communication procedures for the council were institutionalized, and changes in delivery of services to at-risk students had begun. Because of these accomplishments, almost everyone interviewed indicated that Brooksville had taken some steps toward restructuring. At the same time, teachers were beginning to question whether they had done enough and hoped that SDM would enable them to do significantly more. Thus, faculty concern about the limited scope of innovation could be interpreted as a signal of faculty readiness for more significant restructuring in the future. Faculty saw the development of a school "vision" as the next big task, as reflected in the following quotes.

> From what I've gleaned, the creative juices are flowing and we feel now we can really go. . . . There is more support and encouragement and I think we will see more blossoming of things that are more exciting and risky. We have laid a foundation for more risk taking.

> We don't have a vision yet but it isn't necessarily bad not to have a vision. We may be the kind of school that has to see change is possible to create a vision. All schools have the potential for a vision. I don't believe you have to start there.

Factors That Fostered Change at Brooksville Elementary

The process of change at Brooksville was gradual and at times tempestuous. The history of the school and the nature of faculty/administration relationships at the onset of the project almost seemed to set this school up to fail, and yet the faculty and administration made significant progress. In just three years, the faculty, staff, and administration accomplished several major goals:

- developed a collective definition of SDM
- developed and implemented effective governance procedures

- began to make shared decisions and to initiate innovations within the school (e.g., budget and personnel decisions, development of portfolio assessment, development of teams of teachers to work to solve the problems of "at-risk" students) and set the stage for a substantive restructuring effort

- significantly improved difficult trust and communications problems among faculty members and between the faculty and the administration

More significant were implicit changes in role definition and relationships and in shared expectations for the project. Teachers and administrators worked together to accomplish explicit goals and resolve the crisis of communication and trust in the school. In the process, they revised their definitions of roles and improved their interactions with one another. Additionally, faculty members became uneasy with the routine operation of SDM, suggesting they were ready to experiment with more radical reforms. Several school-level and district-level factors played a role in the school's success.

School-Level Factors in Brooksville's Success

Three school-level factors were important to SDM progress at Brooksville. These include the commitment of a core group of faculty members and of Ms. Baker, the structure of key planning meetings, and the creation of structures that increased communication.

Faculty and Administrator Commitment. Faculty and administration at Brooksville wanted SDM to work and to improve the educational opportunities of their students. Faculty demonstrated their commitment by their willingness to give time to SDM. For example, in spring of 1991 the faculty attended two lengthy SDM planning meetings (both were held on school nights, lasting until 9:00 p.m. or later). They then requested more meetings in order to improve school communication. The faculty maintained SDM momentum despite the "work-to-the-rule" policy initiated the following fall. Teachers worked to preserve the "family feeling" that was a part of Brooksville's history and culture. Concern about school culture pushed them to take risks and communicate their concerns and encouraged two support-faculty members to step back from leadership positions within SDM to decrease alienation between regular and support faculty. Their efforts were cited by many as important in resolving the communication crisis.

Ms. Baker demonstrated her commitment to school improvement by working to have Brooksville become an SDM school, by agreeing to allow a researcher to monitor the process, and by creating opportunities for faculty members to express their concerns and dissatisfaction on several occasions. Allowing faculty to vent their frustrations and concerns cannot have been easy for the principal. She was attempting to implement an innovation and knew that faculty comments and concerns were being shared with a researcher. Nevertheless, she created opportunities for faculty members to express concerns and helped to bring issues into the open and to improve communication and trust among faculty members and between faculty and administration.

Another aspect of commitment important in this school was that faculty members

respected one another and tried to see one another's perspectives and the perspective of the administration. Throughout the implementation process, faculty and administration worked to consider the perspectives of others. Teachers noted how difficult it must be for Ms. Baker, an administrator used to making decisions, to share power with the faculty. After all, the administrator was ultimately responsible for the success of the school.

Ms. Baker often noted how hard it was for teachers to believe they could make decisions and to accept the responsibility for their decisions. The work that these people did to try to understand one another seems rooted in their definitions of the school as a family. Family members may have their problems, but they are family, and successful families take work.

Structure of Key Planning Meetings. The planning meetings held in spring of 1990 and 1991 helped people confront their problems, develop common perspectives, and accomplish the tasks set before them. The combination of work, accomplishment, and fun (eating together) at the meetings helped them see one another's perspectives and helped noninstructional staff feel included in the SDM effort. Use of small-group process helped open communication and encouraged faculty to take risks and express their viewpoints. Use of a consensus model encouraged all to develop commitment to the project's explicit aims and strategies. The size of the school made productive schoolwide planning meetings possible, and meetings of the entire faculty were key to SDM success at Brooksville.

Creation of Structures that Support Increased Communication. Because communication was such a significant issue at Brooksville, the establishment of structures to support communication was essential. The establishment of these procedures provided faculty with assurance that communication was important, that their voices would be heard, and that, collectively, they did have the power to confront Ms. Baker. They noted that confrontation was not necessarily easy but they understood that it was both possible and productive on issues of importance to the faculty.

District-Level Factors in Brooksville's Success

In addition to school-level factors, district-level factors contributed to the success of the SDM Project in this school. Although Brooksville's faculty felt the district provided too little structure at the onset of the project, district actions were intended to allow maximum flexibility for schools in the implementation of a project about which little was known. Although the district did not structure the project for the schools, it did provide a great deal of support to schools as they initiated their SDM programs. District-level factors that proved beneficial included core group training, Southern Bell training, the use of an external facilitator, and the inclusion of an evaluation component in the project.

Core Group Training. A faculty/administrator team from each school was identified as a core group that participated in regular training sessions. Training focused on group-process procedures, school-assessment procedures, trust or team building, and planning. The training lacked the specificity schools desired but it did emphasize the importance of consensus, collegiality, and cooperation. Training sessions enabled core-group members to

interact with faculty and administrators from other SDM schools and to "compare notes" about progress and problems. Training sessions helped the Brooksville core group see that their problems were neither unique nor unresolvable. Training helped to build core group enthusiasm and knowledge. In this respect, training was highly successful. In fact, the most common complaint about early training sessions was that too few people were able to attend and others felt "cheated."

Southern Bell Training. At the request of the district, Southern Bell provided a two-day workshop designed to facilitate communication and trust among faculty and administration. Ms. Baker cited this training as of critical importance in her efforts to become more open and communicative with her faculty. It increased her insight about the kind of leader required for shared decision making. Although her faculty thought Ms. Baker was a heavy-handed administrator, Southern Bell training helped her moderate her administrative style.

Use of an External Facilitator. The district provided two external facilitators to assist Brooksville. Because of the significance of their problems with trust and communication, the Brooksville SDM Council asked that a facilitator be assigned to their school to work with them on these problems. Ms. Hazen, a member of the central office staff, volunteered her time. She attended many of the SDM Council meetings and taught the council strategies for increasing faculty input into decision making. Although no one factor was responsible for improving communication and trust at Brooksville, many faculty members mentioned the importance of Brenda Hazen. The other facilitator was hired for two days to facilitate the mid-May meetings.

The Evaluation Component. In developing this project, the district included an evaluation component. In 1990, SDM was initiated in ten schools, and the district contracted with the University of Florida to provide formative evaluation in six of the ten. As a part of this evaluation, Brooksville faculty members participated in interviews and received five reports and a case study describing the status of their project. It is impossible to determine exactly what influence the evaluation study had at Brooksville. It certainly had an influence, however. Indeed, the greatest impact of the study is that it provided a way for faculty members to express their views about the project. The evaluation increased the faculty's voice and brought to the surface problems and tensions that might otherwise have festered and never been resolved. Several faculty members said the evaluation helped them understand and remedy the communication and trust problems that had become severe during the 1990-1991 school year.

Barriers That Impeded Progress

Over the course of this study, respondents mentioned three barriers that stood in the way of SDM success. The first was *time*. Many respondents noted that SDM made more work for faculty, yet provided no additional time. They expressed concern that they would "burn out" unless they found ways to make SDM less time consuming. A related concern was that some faculty members believed too little had been accomplished for the amount of

time they devoted to SDM work and meetings. They believed the project had not yet initiated real innovation or restructuring. Brooksville still looked very similar to other schools in the district. Although these teachers desired change and the school was ready for change, they noted that the change process needed to be speeded up to keep the SDM project from losing momentum.

A second barrier teachers mentioned was *money*. Respondents reacted to funding limitations in different ways. Some lamented the lack of supplemental funding for the SDM Project and noted that its impact would be lessened because money was so tight. Others noted that funding limitations were a result of a larger economic downturn and simply must be endured. They added that continued discussions of "impractical" ideas took too much time and limited the impact of the project.

The third and most significant barrier to successful shared decision making at Brooksville was the nature of the school's *faculty/administration relationships and communication patterns*. This issue had been a concern in the school since before the initiation of the SDM project. Although trust and communication did substantially improve, many noted that the problem had not been solved. Respondents reported forward progress but also noted that everyone needed to seek valid information rather than rely on rumors. Faculty and administration needed to continue their efforts to trust one another. The school had a turbulent history and in recent years had poor communication and low levels of trust. This history was not easily overcome and the climate in the school required continuous and vigilant attention to maintain present levels of success and make further improvements.

Personal Learning and Organizational Learning at Brooksville

At Brooksville, personal learning and organizational learning were fused. Perhaps the essence of organizational learning is the collateral development of individual perspectives that eventually are woven into the fabric of the organization (Foster, 1986a, p. 27). This case study details the three-year change process that allowed administrators and teachers to significantly alter role definitions and relationships with one another. These changes were not universal, were still in process after three years, and were still fragile. Nevertheless, significant change did occur. Thus, the dominant learning within this setting was the development of the sense of collective responsibility and power that is at the heart of the change in role definition.

Through the SDM project, many (but certainly not all) faculty members learned to take a schoolwide perspective of school improvement. They saw the school as a unit and no longer focused exclusively on room-level or grade-level problems. Collaborative work on schoolwide goals helped teachers and administrators build a sense of school community (Lieberman, 1988b; Passow, 1989; Wirth, 1983). At Brooksville, teachers and administrators worked collectively to accomplish the tasks associated with the SDM Project. They learned to listen to one another, to look for commonalities among differing perspectives, and to confront real differences of opinion when necessary. Brooksville teachers spoke about being collectively responsible for running the school, about trusting others to make good decisions,

and about everyone putting in the time needed to make and implement good decisions. Faculty members learned that *together* (in large or small groups) they could confront the principal and talk out differences. Though they did not like confrontation, they learned that they could express themselves, build a case, and successfully work out problems. In this sense, faculty members became professionally empowered as they redefined their roles.

Ms. Baker, too, came to accept and value collective responsibility for decision making in the school. Change in role was not easy for her because she had an authoritarian administrative style. And, like other SDM administrators (Gomez, 1989; Meadows, 1990), she worried that she would be held accountable for any perceived failure in the school. Nevertheless, she tried to alter her interactions with her faculty and to become more accepting of faculty ideas and actions. She worked to become a leader rather than a manager of her faculty (Foster, 1989; Johnson, 1990). The process was difficult for faculty, but, at times, the change process must have been agonizing for Ms. Baker. She had few allies or confidants to help her through the difficult period of change. Although it may sometimes have been hard for Ms. Baker to see, she, too, was empowered by the SDM Project -- empowered to change herself and her interactions with others, and empowered to lead her school toward significant restructuring.

What Can We Learn from This Case?

Essentially, this case is about power, about the history of power relationships in a school, about the problems in trust and communication that resulted from power relationships, about a crisis in communication and trust resulting from early efforts at SDM, and about how individuals within an organization change their role definitions and their relationships with one another as they begin to share power. That is, the case provides insight into the micropolitics of school restructuring within a particular setting (Ball, 1987).

The case is interesting because, in many ways, SDM seemed unlikely to succeed in this school. The history of the school and of the power relationships under Ms. Baker's leadership did not seem conducive to SDM. Yet, after three years, the project was succeeding and lessons from this school may help others beginning similar projects or those attempting to understand change processes in schools.

Specific factors that contributed to Brooksville's success have already been discussed. These include (a) commitment of faculty and administration to SDM and to maintaining a positive climate in the school; (b) the structure of key planning meetings and the sense of accomplishment that resulted; (c) the establishment of structures to sustain open communication, core group training, Southern Bell training, the use of an external facilitator; and (d) feedback provided by the evaluation component. Each of these factors played an incremental role in the school's restructuring process. That is, without any one of them, Brooksville might not have been able to sustain its change efforts. An additional but undiscussed factor, however, seems equally important. At Brooksville, micropolitical issues were brought to the surface and confronted, and thus work toward resolution was productive.

It has been noted that Brooksville had a turbulent past. Prior to Ms. Baker's arrival, faculty believed the school was a peaceful and pleasant place to work. Based on their previous interactions with Mr. Olson, teachers had developed expectations about principals and school leadership (Spindler, 1979). Ms. Baker did not match their expectations, however, and thus was a catalyst for change. Many acknowledged that she made some good changes in the school. They also believed, however, that she had changed the culture of the school in ways that made it less comfortable. Communication and trust had declined, but the conflict remained subterranean (Lacey, 1977) and unconfronted. Older faculty members continued to support one another, to communicate with and trust one another, to operate as a "family," with Ms. Baker as the outsider to be avoided if at all possible. New faculty members essentially acted as a bridge between Ms. Baker and older faculty members. They were accepted into the "family," but they also perceived Ms. Baker more positively and were more accepting of the changes she tried to institute. Although many faculty members talked among themselves about problems in communication and trust in the school, few actively confronted Ms. Baker.

The initiation of SDM provided a second catalyst for this school. Change in an organization inevitably creates conflict (Ball, 1987). SDM was a significant change because SDM is about changing the dynamics of power relationships in a school, and many in this school were unhappy with the existing power relationships. As a result, their fledgling efforts to initiate SDM erupted into a crisis. The problem was so explosive that it would have been difficult to ignore. School personnel began to actively confront problems of power and information control and, in the process, developed strategies to resolve those problems. These strategies were useful in themselves but they had another, unintended consequence: They led teachers and administrators to begin redefining their roles and altering their role relationships. Active confrontation of micropolitical issues was of critical importance in this school's restructuring efforts. It must be noted, however, that successful resolution of conflict required a lot of work and good will from faculty and administrators alike. SDM was a catalyst in this school, but the widespread commitment to making SDM work and preserving a positive climate at Brooksville brought the crisis to successful resolution.

The story at Brooksville did not end after three years. Roles and role relationships were still evolving. SDM had been defined and was in place at Brooksville. The work done in the first three years took time, hard work, and extraordinary commitment. The unanswered question was whether stakeholders would settle back, comfortable with the changes they had made, or move on to tackle the next tasks at hand -- notably, creating a school vision to guide them through significant restructuring.

Fredericks Middle School and the Dynamics of School Reform

Elizabeth Bondy

The Context

Fredericks Middle School (FMS) was established in 1963 as a research-and-development school within the Live Oak County Public School District. People see the school as special, progressive, and innovative. When the Shared Decision-Making (SDM) Project got under way in the district, people inside and outside the school assumed that FMS would move into shared decision making with ease. Fredericks had a tradition of institutional self-confidence, faculty/administration collaboration, teacher leadership, and organizational self-analysis. This case study reports the first three years, from 1990 to 1992, of a shared decision-making project.

The FMS Tradition

FMS teachers described their colleagues as talented and self-confident. They described the faculty as "student conscious" and as holding itself to high standards. They reported that they organized themselves into teams in the early 1970s and had worked collaboratively on numerous projects over the years.

Fredericks also had a long tradition of faculty/administration collaboration. One teacher explained that even when "administrators . . . were a little on the authoritarian side to begin with, [they] changed [after spending] some time here." Teacher leadership positions such as grade-level team leaders and content-area leaders were built into the organizational structure of the school. The 24-member Steering Committee was established when Fredericks joined the Coalition of Essential Schools project in 1985. A former principal explained that the committee's purpose was "to begin to look as a school at what we were doing [and] what we were becoming. [The committee worked to] create a vision, create goals." Schoolwide concerns were discussed in the Steering Committee. Problems were studied and programs and plans developed. The committee took proposals to the faculty for further discussion before taking final action.

Fredericks Middle School did a self-examination as part of their participation in the Coalition project. Some teachers noted that the Coalition project paved the way for the SDM project. The principal explained that "SDM is very much a part of the Coalition idea." The former principal explained that "one of the major things [we learned] from the Coalition was that we needed a process for . . . restructuring . . . the school. The process was SDM." Teachers expected to be a part of decision making at FMS. One teacher said, "There are people here, like myself, who will stand up and fuss and argue if we think things are being dictated or pushed on us. We want to be able to have some say in it." Another teacher explained,

> From its inception Fredericks has been very open to teachers' input. . . . We have always had a say in decision making here, and we have always planned our curriculum according to what the teachers felt was most important. So I don't feel we are getting [something new]; we are just building on what we had already started.

Many teachers agreed that the SDM Project was a logical step for FMS. They said SDM formalized and systematized a philosophy that had guided Fredericks for years. Ninety-four percent of the faculty voted to join the SDM project. Several teachers said they were surprised that six percent voted against the school's participation.

Students and Teachers

FMS is part of the Fredericks complex of schools, which includes two elementary schools, the middle school, and a high school. Students from throughout the district are eligible to attend the Fredericks schools. Parents are anxious for their children to attend and typically begin the application process early. Shortly after a child is born his or her name is often put on the Fredericks schools' waiting list, which at the time of this study had over 13,000 names. About 370 new students (students who had not attended one of the Fredericks elementary schools) are admitted to the sixth-grade class at FMS each year.

The school board requires that Fredericks' student population match the black/white ratio in Live Oak County. Until recently, 25 percent of the student body was African-American. Because the county's African-American population increased to 29% at the time of this study, the school personnel anticipated that they might be required to increase its admissions of black students.

At the time of this study, FMS families came from all parts of Live Oak County. Despite transportation problems, parents were active in the affairs of the school. Parent Advisory Council meetings were held during the day and typically attracted 35-40 people. Once a year the principal held evening meetings in different parts of the county. These meetings were well attended. During the spring of 1992, a parent meeting was held at the school. The topic was improving study skills, a goal of Frederick's school-improvement plan. Students were offered incentives to come to the meeting and bring their parents. Eight hundred people attended the meeting. Parent involvement was so high at Fredericks that some teachers believed parent attention made their work more difficult.

Parents of students enrolled in the Multicultural Program were very much involved in school life. The coordinator of this program was the only teacher who spoke enthusiastically of the parent involvement her program enjoyed.

Fifteen hundred students attended FMS during each year of the study. They were taught by a faculty of 78 teachers, 13.4 percent of whom were African-American. (The district required that at least 12 percent of every school's faculty be black.) Fredericks teachers were organized into three grade-level teams (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Grade-level teams were further divided into subgroups. Each subgroup had one or more teachers from each of four major subject areas (English, science, social studies, math). Teachers on a subgroup team taught the same students and had a common planning time. Teachers had been organized in teams since the 1972-1973 school year, though the team structure had evolved over time. The current organization, known as the Howard Plan, had a stable sixth-grade team of teachers. The seventh- and eighth-grade teachers stayed with the same students for two years.

About half of the FMS teachers had received or were pursuing master's degrees. Two had doctorates and several more were enrolled in doctoral programs. Almost 20 percent of Frederick's teachers had been at the school for a decade or more. At the end of the second year of the study, only five teachers had left the school. In previous years the turnover was higher, with 12 to 24 teachers leaving each year. Leavers generally were newer teachers who, some speculated, were overwhelmed by the many demands and high expectations that came with teaching at FMS.

Special Programs

There were three special programs at FMS. One was the Coalition of Essential Schools, which the school had joined in 1985. A second was a mathematics magnet program, which began in 1989. Seventy-five to 80 sixth-graders entered the Mathematics Education for Gifted Secondary School Students program each year. Students qualified by performing well on a general mathematics exam. Admission to the mathematics magnet program was handled separately from the FMS admissions procedures. The program increased the school's student population by 150.

A third special program at FMS was the Multicultural Program, which also had separate admissions procedures. FMS had been named a center for exotic languages. Students were assessed at a district office and admitted to the program based on their English proficiency. Together, the students at FMS spoke 32 languages and came from 52 countries. There were 317 students enrolled in the Multicultural Program, the largest such program in the district.

Evolution of SDM at Fredericks Middle School

Several recent events at FMS influenced the evolution of SDM at the school. During the spring of 1991, a long-awaited renovation project was begun on the Fredericks campus. The project had several goals: to further separate the middle and high school students; to increase the school's enrollment capacity; to modernize the facility; to provide separate gymnasiums for the two schools; and to build new science, media, and administration/ guidance buildings at the middle school. When construction was completed, there would be six buildings on the FMS campus. Construction extended into the spring of 1992, causing teachers inconvenience and distress and disrupting faculty cohesion. One teacher explained her sense of isolation like this:

> If your house was being renovated and you had to live in a place with holes all around you and gates up all over the place, and you couldn't go to places that you were used to going, and you didn't see your kid for three days, you'd be feeling pretty bad! Then suddenly you bump into somebody you used to see a lot, and you say, "Oh, do you still live here?"

Teachers who were relocated to temporary classrooms during construction had few opportunities to talk with colleagues about schoolwide concerns. In addition, some teachers were disgruntled over their new room assignments. They believed their desires were not

given adequate attention.

A second event that influenced SDM at Fredericks was a change in administration. The principal left Fredericks for a district-level position as SDM was being introduced to the school. She had been at Fredericks for eight years and was popular with faculty, parents, and students. She was a strong advocate of SDM and was referred to as "Ms. SDM" by a district administrator. The principalship was filled by the school's assistant principal, Paul Logan.

Although teachers were fond of the new principal, it was difficult for him and for some faculty to adjust to the fast-changing situation at Fredericks. Getting used to a new administration, an ambitious construction program, and a newly established governance structure all at the same time put great strains on everyone in the Fredericks community. Teachers and administrators had not yet defined the role of the principal in an SDM school. Differences of opinion existed on this issue that had not been fully aired or worked out. Some teachers assumed that the principal would bring all decisions to the faculty. They were angered when they heard about decisions in which they believed they had not had a voice. A frequent complaint from some Fredericks teachers was, "I thought we were supposed to be an SDM school! Nobody asked me about this!" One teacher commented, "I wouldn't want to be Paul Logan for anything. . . . Now that we're an SDM school, there's more bitching than ever!"

One of Mr. Logan's early decisions as principal had considerable impact on the SDM Project. Although the Steering Committee (which had played a key role in school decision making since 1985) disbanded when SDM was introduced in 1990, another long-standing committee was maintained. This committee, which had been called "Team and Content Leaders," was given the name "Leadership Group." The members of the Leadership Group also had been members of the Steering Committee. The Leadership Group included the three grade-level team leaders, all content-area leaders, administrators, and program area heads (e.g., bilingual, guidance, advisor-advisee). Although Mr. Logan viewed the SDM Council and the Leadership Group as having distinct functions, with the council responsible for "vision" and school improvement and the Leadership Group responsible for assisting in the day-to-day running of the school, some teachers were disturbed by the existence of the Leadership Group. The role of the Leadership Group and its relationship to the SDM Council became a source of confusion and resentment for some council members. They questioned Mr. Logan's commitment to SDM because they believed he relied heavily on the advice of the Leadership Group. As will be discussed later in this case study, considerable progress was ultimately made toward resolving tension over this issue.

District-level events also influenced the evolution of SDM at Fredericks Middle School. For example, a prolonged contract dispute between the teachers' union and the school board lowered teacher morale. A tight budget made summer negotiations difficult. When they dragged on into the fall, the teachers' union announced a "work-to-the-rule" order. Teachers were asked to confine their job activities to those required by the contract. This had a direct impact on the school's SDM efforts by shortening SDM Council meetings. Whereas the council had been meeting from 8:00 until 9:00 a.m., it delayed meeting until 8:30 a.m. so as to comply with the contract work hours. By November, council members realized that they were accomplishing little in half-hour meetings. Explained one teacher:

> We tried to stick with the work-to-the-rule thing, but we couldn't. We've finally said, "Screw it! We're gonna meet at our regular time." We weren't getting anything accomplished in a half an hour. With so little time to meet, no wonder we kept feeling confused about what we were supposed to be doing.

FMS teachers have a tradition of hard work, innovation, and commitment to students. They were eager to participate in the SDM project. Their story is one of perseverance in the face of challenging conditions that were part of the context, history, and culture of the school. Before examining these challenges and the school's attempts to address them, let us turn to FMS's goals for SDM.

SDM Objectives

Although an increasing number of teachers came to understand SDM as a school restructuring strategy, there were still teachers who saw shared decision making as an end in itself. For the latter group, SDM was simply a way to give teachers a say in school decisions. A number of Fredericks stakeholders believed that the name of the project -- shared decision making -- misfocused attention on the method of the project and not on its goal: namely, school restructuring.

Even teachers who talked about SDM as a restructuring strategy did not share a long-term vision for SDM. Most teachers said that the purpose of SDM was to improve student achievement and teacher professionalism, but they had not developed a focus for these broad aims. Instead, short-term goals were identified at three points in time when written plans were required by the district.

The first plan (July 1990) was drawn up by the SDM Council, based on faculty input. The plan focused on involving teachers more directly in budget and staffing decisions, promoting the personal and social development of students, and improving parent-school communication. Committees comprised of council members and other teachers were formed to develop proposals in each of these three areas. Some committee members were unclear about their assignment and just how they were to work with the council. Nevertheless, proposals were produced by all four committees and were shared with the faculty. Perhaps due to the complex nature of their topic, the greatest confusion over direction and purpose existed within the Personal and Social Development Committee. As a result, this committee did not produce a clear action plan.

The SDM Council worked with the faculty to develop a second plan during the spring of 1991. The plan was based on the Live Oak School District's general school improvement goals, or Live Oak 2000. The faculty decided they would try to improve students' study skills, faculty and student use of hypermedia, and teachers' research skills. The purpose of the latter goal was to enable teachers to study and document innovation efforts at Fredericks. Study skills and hypermedia committees planned and carried out activities during the following fall. The faculty research goal appeared to have faded from teachers' memories.

A third plan, again addressing Live Oak 2000 goals, was developed during the spring of 1992. Its objectives included implementing a schoolwide peer coaching program, exploring flexible scheduling options, and incorporating vocational and life skills into the curriculum. The faculty had mixed reactions to these goals. Some teachers liked the goals. Some said the goals were acceptable but unexciting. They had hoped for bigger changes and worried that Fredericks had not displayed the initiative, nerve, or imagination needed to make significant improvements. Several people commented that they wished more teachers were risk takers. One teacher said:

> I keep saying, "Let's think big, let's think big," and then I'm just kind of shut down . . . . Some of these people are always saying, "We just can't do that. The county won't let us do that." Well, how do we know we can't do that? It's like a defeatist attitude.

Some teachers worried that the three goals would get so watered down that they would not really change anything. For example, although peer coaching had the potential to bring about fundamental curricular and instructional change, it might only reinforce the status quo if it became a socializing opportunity for friends who taught the same way. Another concern about the goals was that they would get "short-stopped," meaning that the goals would not be adopted schoolwide and not adequately assessed for their impact. Some said that this had happened with the previous year's goals. Although some teachers focused on the third plan's goals, the entire faculty never got behind them. They became the projects of a few teachers rather than a schoolwide effort.

Teachers were involved in identifying school-improvement goals and some helped to write the action plans for goal implementation. A number of the goals were partially implemented; however, many teachers commented that SDM had not accomplished anything significant at FMS. Their belief could be explained by the "short-stopping" phenomenon. That is, because school-improvement efforts had not been given schoolwide support, many teachers were not aware of them, did not buy into them, or did not recognize them as their own.

To this point, then, FMS had identified several school-improvement goals and implemented action plans somewhat haphazardly. The goals had not been united by a vision of what FMS wanted to become.

Some teachers said that SDM efforts should be directed by Coalition of Essential Schools' principles. Said one Coalition supporter, "I see SDM as a vehicle to further the principles of the Essential Schools Project." Although the school claimed to be in the Coalition, only a small number of teachers ever mentioned the Coalition or related it to the SDM Project. These few teachers explained that Coalition principles provided a framework for thinking about school improvement. They believed, however, that the school had not sustained its commitment to the Coalition. The year following this case study, the school planned to engage in the Coalition's affirmation process. Teachers were to have the opportunity to revisit and rethink the Coalition principles and consider their implications for SDM and school improvement.

Some stakeholders realized that teachers had difficulty thinking about school restructuring because they had never been given the opportunity to make significant changes in their own schools. Change had always been planned by others and imposed on teachers. Change had always been someone else's responsibility. Furthermore, FMS teachers had few opportunities to talk with one another about school-improvement issues because of contract and construction disruptions. For this reason, the principal decided to call more frequent faculty meetings and to focus discussion on school-improvement issues. The council planned and ran Shareholders' Meetings during the spring of 1992. The meetings were designed to promote dialogue about change and to encourage teachers to see themselves as responsible change agents. Shareholders' Meetings will be discussed in more detail later in this case study.

Changes Achieved through SDM

When the SDM Project was introduced at FMS, teachers' attention was directed to procedural issues. The first procedural issue was how to form the SDM Council. Teachers became embroiled in a lengthy debate over who would serve on the council. Several faculty and team meetings were held to determine how best to select council members. Several explanations were offered for the controversy. Some said teachers were unclear about the purpose and functions of the council and therefore did not know what criteria to apply to the selection of council members. Others believed that some of their colleagues resisted changing the school's governance structure. Still others said that some teachers were worried about losing their formal and informal leadership roles. Explained a teacher, "People who have felt safe and comfortable in positions have some concerns that their authority is being taken away from them."

The faculty decided to meet in teams and agreed that each team would propose a selection plan. A three-member committee would review the three proposals for points of agreement and disagreement and bring a single proposal back to the faculty for further discussion. A plan was agreed on, but elections were postponed until the faculty voted on whether they should vote across teams or only for those teachers on their team. A large majority of the faculty voted in favor of having faculty vote across teams. One teacher explained the rationale for this kind of election:

> We were trying desperately to make this seem like a unified school. Although we do have the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teams, we would like to look at it as Fredericks Middle School. That was the biggest reason to go with the open school election. We are trying to become more unified and consistent in our programs across the board.

With the election of the council, facultywide conversation about SDM stopped. The council set to developing a plan for how it would operate. That work took over 15 hours of meeting time, including a full school day during which council members were excused from classes. A number of council members became annoyed at the slow pace of the work and wanted to begin to tackle school problems. Others thought it important that the council first

agree on a clear plan of operation. By the end of the 1990 school year, the council had completed its operational plan and gathered data from faculty regarding priorities for school improvement. The council met during the summer to draw up the first school-improvement plan.

Designing a workable governance structure consumed teachers' attention in the first year of SDM. Teachers worried about who would sit on the council. Many called for "new blood" and, indeed, no team leaders were elected to the SDM Council. The faculty was pleased with the results of the election. What did not take place during the early days of SDM at FMS was a discussion about the meaning and purpose of SDM. Often teachers said they were not sure what the council was supposed to do, or what SDM was all about. One teacher said, "They don't tell you what the council is supposed to do. That was part of the problem in developing a council. How do you ask people to participate in something when you don't know what it's going to do?" These concerns never became the focus of school discussion. When the school year began in the fall of 1990 the council invited teachers to drop their problems and concerns in SDM suggestion boxes located in team planning areas. This action helped define SDM as a mechanism for solving teachers' immediate problems, rather than a process for examining long-term school-improvement issues.

By early 1992 the SDM Council recognized that something had to be done to pull the faculty together and focus its collective attention on school improvement. Council members understood that the faculty lacked a shared definition of SDM, that communication between the council and the rest of the faculty had been poor, and that non-council members were uninvolved in SDM (each of these problems and others will be discussed in the next section of the case study).

Role Clarification and Improved Communication

Council members had become more sure of their roles. They viewed themselves as leading the school's "growth[20] and visions" efforts. They also had become more sure of the role of non-council-member teachers. They saw their colleagues as responsible for school improvement. In short, they had come to see SDM as everyone's responsibility. They used the word "shareholders" to emphasize that every teacher had an investment in the school and a responsibility for its future. In Shareholders' Meetings held during the spring of 1992, facilitators worked to show teachers that SDM and the SDM Council were two different things. They emphasized that everyone at FMS was responsible for making SDM work. To this end, teachers were asked not only to suggest what problems the school should tackle the next year but to volunteer to serve on at least one school-improvement committee.

Another step the council took to clarify roles was to develop and present to the faculty a chart entitled "What Is Shared Decision Making?" The chart includes the district's and the school's definition of SDM (see Appendix B). A diagram indicates the kinds of decisions to be addressed through SDM and the groups responsible for making those decisions. Council

[20]I am using the school's language (see Appendix B); however, it might be useful for FMS to examine what they mean by "growth."

members hoped that teachers would begin to focus on the broader purposes of SDM rather than on the narrow procedures for decision making.

As part of the role clarification effort, the council began to classify issues the faculty brought to them as "maintenance issues" (day-to-day issues that could be handled by existing committees) or "vision issues" (long-term school-improvement issues that should be handled by the SDM Council). The council wanted to help the teachers see that standing committees should handle day-to-day maintenance issues and that the council should focus on developing new programs that would improve the quality of the work place and student achievement. As many council members were aware, some teachers were concerned about this classification scheme because they feared that some maintenance issues would not get the attention they deserved if they were relegated to standing committees. One teacher said,

> I think the fact that we wanted to change some of those things was visionary. Now [those changes] won't happen because [the issues] became maintenance items. . . . [The issues] will just go [back] to the group that's been working on [them] all along. . . . I don't think anything new will come out of it. . . . We don't want things to be maintained in the same old way. There should be vision involved in those things that are ongoing.

Teachers expressed particular concern about two maintenance items, discipline and the adviser-advisee program. They wanted to see these areas examined carefully. As one teacher emphasized:

> If you really look at discipline [as something more than] M & M's and Titan Bolts . . . you have to get under the surface and eventually [in]to the curriculum. You have to ask, "How might *we* be contributing to discipline problems? Are we really meeting the kids' needs?" To see the problem as simply needing a new discipline plan does not [examine] the depth of the issue. [That approach] will lead to just one more bandaid [solution] to discipline.

One council member said the council must see to it that teachers' maintenance concerns "do not fade away." Judging by the degree of teacher interest in some of these matters, this was a good idea.

Fredericks Middle School's most important accomplishments by the end of the study were in the areas of role clarification and council-faculty communication. The council struggled to figure out what it should and should not be doing and attempted to share these insights with the faculty. It may have been premature to call these efforts "accomplishments" -- their impact on the faculty and on school improvement remained to be seen. It was encouraging, however, to see a number of teachers who were not Council members serving on committees and writing up Live Oak 2000 action plans.

Challenges to SDM Progress

When SDM began at FMS it appeared that the school would move effortlessly into shared governance; but no one at the school would say that progress toward SDM was quick or easy. Many problems impeded the school's SDM efforts. In recent months, the council took steps to address these impediments. Following is a survey of those problems and the attempts to tackle them.

Lack of Shared Definition for SDM

FMS teachers and administrators did not share an understanding of what SDM meant, what its purpose was, or how it should be conducted. Many non-council teachers developed the view that SDM meant the Council would solve day-to-day problems teachers identified as important:

> Let's not get into these wish lists and dream fantasies that will never happen. The goals should be specific, realistic, and not farfetched. You have to work on the goals that are immediate and not try to be too broad.

Teachers expected to be consulted about proposals before the council took action but did not see themselves as responsible for developing or implementing solutions. In other words, many teachers viewed their role in SDM as identifying problems to be solved and giving feedback about proposed solutions. They thought the SDM Council was responsible for solving the problems.

An explanation for this view may lie in the way the county introduced SDM to core teams, and core teams, in turn, introduced SDM to their respective schools. Because the first order of SDM business was the formation of a council, the school focused on the *procedures* of SDM rather than its *purpose*. This early focus on establishing a council had two effects. First, it denied people the opportunity to consider the purposes of the project. Second, it served to pair SDM with SDM Council in the minds of many teachers. That is, teachers began to think of "council" and "SDM" as synonymous. They viewed anything beyond identifying problems to be solved as the responsibility of the elected council.

A contributing factor to teachers' confusion over the meaning of SDM was the project's title, "Shared Decision Making." This title focused attention on making decisions rather than on the nature of those decisions. Had the project been called "School Restructuring," or "Shared Thinking," as one council member suggested, teachers might have interpreted its purpose and their role in the project quite differently. As it was, many teachers interpreted SDM as simply meaning that they should have a say in every school decision. They had the right to be heard, the collective power of veto on decisions they did not like, but no individual or collective responsibility to design or implement SDM plans.

By the 1991-1992 school year, council members had taken a broader view of SDM and everyone's role in the project. As one council member explained, "We shifted the focus from 'What can we [the council] do for you?' to 'What efforts are *you* [the teachers] willing

to make to improve this school?'" Council members became determined to show teachers that SDM was their responsibility. They planned small-group teacher meetings to promote this understanding. The meetings were called "Shareholders' Meetings" to emphasize teachers' ownership of the school and its future. Teachers were asked to sign up to work on committees before leaving the meeting. Non-council teachers volunteered to serve on writing committees to draw up action plans for the three Live Oak 2000 goals. These committees reconvened during the summer of 1992 to develop plans and implement action steps.

Council members appeared to agree about the purpose of SDM more after three years than they did in the beginning. Although some council members continued to say that SDM should address day-to-day school procedures and policies, the council classified such topics as maintenance items and relegated them to other committees. The council declared (in Shareholders' Meetings and by way of a written description of SDM) that the domain of SDM included issues related to growth and vision. As one teacher said, "SDM should help set the course and keep us on the right track."

Faculty Tension about Who Had Power

In 1990, when SDM was getting started, some faculty members believed a few leader teachers had special influence and power at FMS. When the faculty voted on SDM Council membership they elected many teachers who had leadership potential but had not been part of the school's formal leadership Council members had to learn more about the school, their colleagues, the new administration, and their role on the council at the same time that they were trying to make a new governance structure work and define the meaning of SDM. The work was difficult and tensions developed as council members tried to define their roles and responsibilities.

Council members said that on some occasions they were verbally "attacked" during meetings, that some "people on the council have hidden agendas," and that colleagues were sometimes rude. These tensions were probably traceable to members' role confusions and anxiety over who gained control of the council's activities and direction. Word spread among the faculty that "on the council there are certain people who have more say than others, and they kind of monopolize," as one teacher explained.

Although some teachers said that power was not an issue at FMS, many teachers believed that it was. What had changed since the early days of SDM was the way FMS teachers dealt with their concerns about the powerful and the powerless. After the original council was elected, two team leaders were elected to the council and a council member was elected to a team leader position; teachers seemed to have reconsidered their earlier idea to block teacher leaders from formal leadership positions. The council was working more effectively as a group. Early meetings were tumultuous and some members considered resigning. Most were glad they stayed to witness the progress the council ultimately made. Several said that the council benefited from the help of a consultant who suggested communication strategies and taught them how to run more effective meetings. Several also said that a council facilitator helped keep the group on task. Council members believed that it took time to mature as a group and to understand one another's perspectives. As one

council member explained,

> Those of us who attend meetings consistently now understand each other's perspective. [Now] when someone starts talking we don't get angry or offended; we realize where he's coming from, we understand him. I think we're more mature now.

Another power-related issue was the tension between advocates of substantial change and those who were perceived to support the status quo. A teacher who was not on the council explained that SDM was really just a power struggle between new teachers and "the old guard power people." Council members tended to frame the issue differently. They saw a tension between those who wanted to restructure the school and others "who would not take a risk." Several Council members were frustrated with those who responded to change proposals by saying, "We can't do that here," or, "This is the way we've done it in the past and it's always worked for us." The risk takers were eager to push the limits, to propose something really innovative, but said they met with strong resistance from some teachers. Part of the frustration stemmed from the belief that the "defenders of the past" were powerful teachers who had a lot of influence with the principal. Without the principal's support, the risk takers believed they would be unable to alter the status quo.

The principal spoke eagerly about wanting to make fundamental changes at FMS. He believed firmly that he was not aligned with any particular teacher or teacher group and genuinely desired input from everyone on the faculty. It always takes groups in an organization time to reach common understandings, build trust, and learn to work together toward common goals. The Council worked to learn that lesson, and it appeared the faculty was ready to do the same. Central to that work would be improved communication among all FMS stakeholders. The principal took steps in this direction by increasing the number of schoolwide faculty meetings. His plan was to bring teachers together regularly to talk about school improvement. Council members were pleased that the principal was taking these initiatives.

Lack of Momentum for SDM

Council members recognized that SDM was moving slowly. The union's work-to-the-rule policy shortened SDM meetings. SDM momentum also was stalled by not ending the 1990-1991 school year with a clear plan of action for the fall and by not holding summer meetings to gear up for the following year. Low morale and lack of faculty cohesion (due to contextual factors discussed earlier in this case study) further slowed the SDM effort. Teachers reported they were trying to survive poor teaching conditions caused by the construction project and to simply get through the day. Some believed they did not have time to give to SDM committee work.

The council took several steps to address the momentum problem. First, they decided in January 1992 to meet more often and for longer periods. Second, they organized the Shareholders' Meetings to rekindle enthusiasm for SDM. Third, they contacted committee chairpeople to encourage them to hold meetings during the summer so as to begin the school

year with plans in place.

Perceived Lack of Support for SDM at School, District, and State Levels

A number of teachers believed that district and state officials did not strongly support SDM. They said that the district and state sent mixed messages about SDM. Officials claimed to support SDM but sent mandate after mandate to the schools with which schools were expected to comply immediately. Rather than feeling empowered by SDM, teachers who believed their change efforts were neither recognized nor supported felt frustrated and powerless. One teacher said,

> Are they really serious about giving us autonomy? You know there was a school that wanted to change its schedule to some kind of unusual schedule, and it was bounced back at the state level. And the same thing happens at the district level. The superintendent announced that there will be no middle school specialists next year, regardless of what the individual schools want. So the state and the district still have veto power. A lot of people are very upset and discouraged over this kind of thing.

After the inception of SDM at Fredericks in 1990, teachers became increasingly skeptical about the district's commitment to SDM. One concern was over the two district SDM coordinator positions, which they feared would not be filled or would be amalgamated into other positions.

Lack of Clarity about School Decision-Making Processes

Some decisions made at Fredericks Middle School during the fall of 1991 spurred a number of teachers to ask, "Who is involved in what decisions and at what point in time?" As mentioned earlier, the name "Shared Decision Making" was interpreted by many teachers to mean that they would have input into all school decisions that affected them. When this did not occur, some teachers complained, "I thought this was supposed to be a shared-decision-making school."

A number of council members were initially confused about the roles of the SDM Council and the Leadership Group. Some council members thought they should be consulted on issues that the principal took to the Leadership Group. The principal and a small number of faculty saw the two groups as having distinct responsibilities. During the spring of 1992, questions about school decision-making responsibilities were addressed by the council, the Leadership Group, and the administration. The decision-making responsibilities chart (Appendix B) was presented to the faculty to help them understand school processes.

Lack of Communication on the Council and between the Council and the Faculty

Although communication within the council ranged from poor to good over time, it was apparent during the fall of 1991 that communication on the council was poor. Although

a non-council-member teacher said, "You really don't know what's going on [with SDM] unless you're on the council," it was evident that even council members were not sure what was going on. At that time council meetings occurred only once a month and lasted for only 30 minutes. Minutes from council meetings were not always distributed to council members or to the faculty. As a result, council members were not sure of the status of certain committees and council actions.

Most council members recognized the fall of 1991 as a low point in SDM activity. They attributed this to the contextual factors described earlier in this case study. After the December holidays, the council worked to revive the school's SDM efforts by meeting more often, clarifying roles and purposes, and planning Shareholders' Meetings.

Communication between council and faculty was a problem. Because there was a lack of momentum, a perceived lack of support, and a lack of clarity and shared vision, the council did not involve the rest of the faculty in SDM. (The previous principal commented that the Steering Committee, formed during the early days of the Coalition, wrestled with communication problems, too. She said, "We were always looking for ways to communicate better with the rest of the faculty.") As a result of poor council-faculty communication, many teachers did not view SDM as having accomplished anything. Some Council members believed that the faculty had little interest in SDM because teachers never heard much about the project.

At the time this case study was written, the council-faculty pattern of communication looked like this: Each fall there was less communication, and there seemed to be a lull in SDM activity. Each spring communication improved. Meetings were held, goals were identified, and action plans were drawn up. Over the summer activity stopped and in the fall SDM got little attention. It may be that with more faculty meetings and more teacher participation on SDM committees this pattern will be broken, that SDM activities will begin during pre-planning and continue into the fall, council-faculty communication and communication about school improvement in general will improve, and SDM will begin to make real progress at FMS.

The Common Perception that SDM Leadership Was Someone Else's Responsibility

I have discussed the problem of teachers seeing SDM as the responsibility of the council. Another problem in people's perceptions of responsibility concerns views of SDM leadership. Some council members believed the principal should make SDM a top priority, actively promote SDM throughout the school, and take steps to solve problems in the SDM project. One teacher expressed this opinion:

> SDM has to be addressed continually by the principal. It has to be put in the spotlight, in the forefront, in order to create an atmosphere of cooperation, to show that we are all working on this together. . . . The principal needs to help us get together and set priorities.

The principal believed that teachers were responsible for SDM progress. He did not believe he should have directed the school's SDM efforts and reminded council members that he was a member of the council, just as they were. The council members pointed out that teachers looked to the principal for leadership and that he set the tone for the school. It seemed that some teachers wanted the principal to be the leader who worked to make SDM succeed but did not dominate the SDM process itself. They wanted him to be a powerful advocate of teacher empowerment, school reform, and democratic leadership. The principal, however, wanted the teachers to take responsibility for SDM.

The issue of leadership is problematic in an organization attempting to operate democratically. One council member noted that the council developed a shared-leadership style. Each member had certain strengths that enabled him or her to act as a leader in certain situations. This concept of shared leadership may have helped the council and the faculty decide who would be responsible for various activities at FMS. However, there continued to be some confusion about the role of the principal at FMS. What should be the role of a principal in an SDM school? The faculty and administration might have wanted to deal directly with this question in future faculty meetings.

When the SDM project began in Live Oak County in 1990, FMS appeared to be a high-readiness candidate. People inside and outside the school expected that SDM would be implemented smoothly and that the school would quickly become a leader in school restructuring. On closer analysis it became clear that there were a number of factors related to the school's history and culture that made swift progress difficult. During the spring of 1992 the council took steps to address many of the problems that had plagued the school's SDM efforts. Significant progress was made during the following school year. It was imperative that the SDM project become the central focus of the school's attention if FMS hoped to move toward significant restructuring.

Personal And Organizational Learning

During the first three years of the SDM project at FMS, important lessons were learned, but these lessons were learned by individuals rather than by the school as a whole. The lessons were not institutionalized. The organization as a whole did not learn SDM lessons because the whole organization did not participate in SDM or nurture its evolution. There was little schoolwide communication about the purposes, procedures, problems, and accomplishments of SDM. The council did work to clarify roles and the purposes of SDM at FMS, however. Council members believed they had learned a lot about SDM and how to get it off the ground. As reported earlier, they shared their understandings with the rest of the faculty and were hopeful that the school would enter a new phase of SDM, one in which all teachers saw themselves as responsible for working toward change.

Although SDM was still not well integrated into the life of FMS, some of the people

who were involved in SDM did learn significant lessons. These personal learnings included:

• *SDM demands schoolwide discussion and effective council-faculty communication* (Elenbogen and Hiestand, 1989). Council members recognized that non-council teachers must be engaged in the SDM conversation. They saw that communication was important if teachers were to take ownership of and responsibility for SDM. SDM could not succeed if the faculty delegated all responsibility to the council. Of course, the council did not deliberately keep the faculty in the dark about SDM. Rather, because council members had been working to define roles and purposes, they were not confident about involving the faculty in what was still a murky area.

• *SDM demands time* (Cistone, Fernandez, and Tornillo, 1989; Little, 1982). A corollary to the communication lesson learned at FMS is a lesson concerning time. Teachers needed time to meet and discuss school concerns and visions for the school's future. Some council members explained that if restructuring was to happen, teachers had to begin to think of themselves as change agents who generated ideas, discuss plans, and implement projects to improve the school. Teachers at FMS did not typically meet in large groups to discuss curricular and instructional issues, educational aims, and possibilities for the future. Nor were these topics the focus of team and content area meetings.

• *Council members need time to plan for and implement change* (Little, 1982). A number of council members recognized that brief monthly meetings did not give them the time they needed to launch SDM at FMS. One council member received a grant that allowed the council some in-school time for planning. This was a one-time opportunity, however. No long-standing solution to the time problem was found. Teachers had to share the work load if change was to take place. Some council members and a few teachers who had been active on SDM committees recognized that more teachers should be involved in school projects. This lesson is related to the communication and time problems described above. When teachers do not see themselves as part of the project and having some responsibility for its success, they are not likely to volunteer their time. A few teachers had quite a sophisticated understanding of this problem, as illustrated by this teacher's comment, "We have to unite as a faculty if we're going to create the context for change."

• *SDM demands micropolitical awareness and a willingness to forge alliances* (Ball, 1987; Iannoccone, 1991). A few council members learned the importance of building bridges between groups of teachers. Some young teachers explained that they must link with the more experienced, influential teachers and that they must work together to improve the school. One teacher said, "We have to work to engage the influential group in conversation . . . . You have to reach them on an intellectual basis. If you have a strong argument, you can begin a constructive dialogue with them." These novice teachers developed micropolitical awareness. Rather than fighting teachers who had influence, they hoped to establish common goals that would enable them to collaborate for the good of the students at FMS.

• *The manner in which SDM is introduced to a school shapes its future in the school.*

As described earlier, when SDM was introduced to FMS, teachers' attention was directed toward the procedural issue of forming the SDM Council. Although some people voiced confusion about the responsibilities of this council, discussion centered on how it should be formed and who should be on it. There was no discussion about the meaning of SDM and what purposes it might serve at FMS. As a result, three years later the school was still working to develop a shared definition of SDM. It was not surprising that people at FMS held different definitions of SDM. What we can learn from their experience is that for progress to take place the faculty must discuss the purpose of SDM and reach shared meaning.

These are the kinds of personal lessons that FMS stakeholders learned during the first three years of the SDM project. During the spring of 1992 the council acted on some of these lessons to improve communication about SDM and focus teachers on their responsibility for its success. As a result, the 1991-1992 school year ended with schoolwide optimism about SDM. The challenge then facing the Fredericks Middle School community was to maintain its momentum and a strong commitment to SDM by encouraging conversation about school restructuring, and enacting specific plans for ensuring ongoing teacher involvement.

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Appendix A

1991-1992 SDM/Focus 2000 Goals, Objectives, and Action Strategies

Goal 1: Improve discipline

Objective: Students will demonstrate respect for people, property and rules

Strategies:
(a) Discipline committee created
(b) Parent involvement stressed
(c) Staff development

Goal 2: Improve ability to meet needs of at-risk learners

Objective: Provide interventions so students will experience success and enjoy more positive attitudes toward school

Strategies:
(a) Set up at-risk teams by grade level to design interventions (waiver)
(b) Each teacher use one innovative technique
(c) Establish parent involvement committee to increase parent involvement
(d) Request additional psychological services

Goal 3: Improve trust and communication among staff

Objective: Foster a secure, trust-building environment conducive to open communication and honest feedback

Strategies:
(a) Sensitivity training workshop
(b) Set up orientation committee for new faculty
(c) Bi-monthly faculty meetings with agenda posted two days in advance
(d) SDM Council provides a yearly curriculum calendar
(e) SDM Council fosters communication with open agendas and open meetings
(f) Minutes from all faculty and SDM meetings available to staff
(g) Set up SDM governance committee to clarify roles and responsibilities (waiver) (Governance plan attached)

Note: In addition to these strategies, which are listed in the Focus 2000 plan, it is our understanding that agendas for bi-monthly SDM Council meetings will be posted two days in advance and that SDM memos will be color-coded for easy identification.

Goal 4: Curriculum restructuring

Objective: Provide atmosphere conducive to innovative curriculum restructuring to increase student interest and achievement

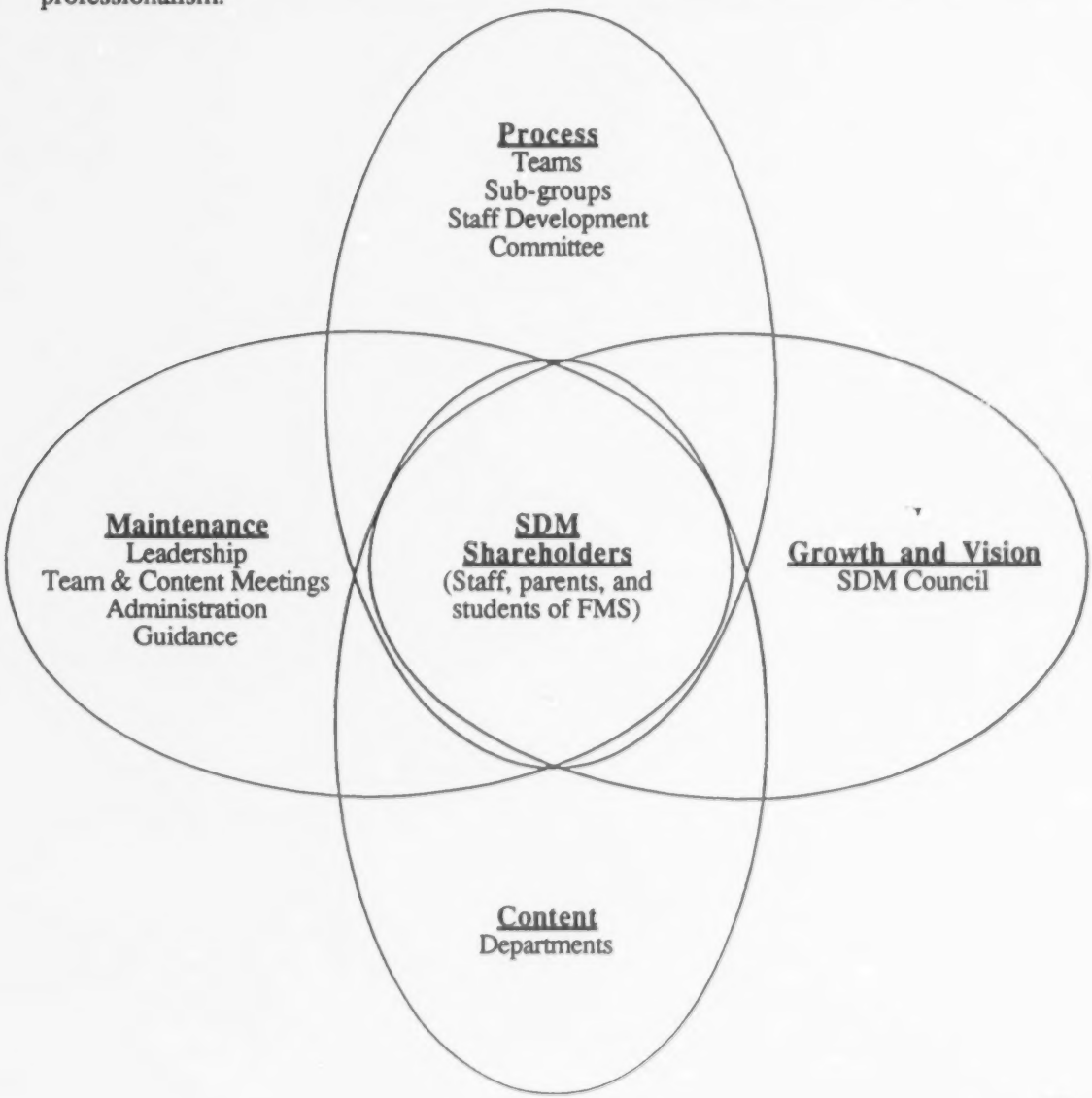
Strategies:
(a) Develop proposal to permit discretionary use of Chapter 1 funds (waiver)
(b) Establish ongoing scheduled release time during school day for professional development activities
(c) Administer needs assessment to determine interest and needs for staff development
(d) By March 1992 rethink, reevaluate, and restructure schoolwide standardized testing program
(e) By September, 1991, rethink, re-evaluate and restructure method of reporting pupil progress (waiver) (portfolio assessment for second grade; same report card waivers for rest of grades as last year)

Appendix B

What is Shared Decision Making?

"Shared decision-making is a democratic management style that involves teachers, parents, students, staff members and administrators in the making of school-based decisions. Faculty and administrative energies are directed at designing, developing, and implementing strategies to improve instructional practices and to maximize student achievement."

The above definition of shared decision making is the "project's" definition. What is Fredericks Middle's definition? The SDM Council, through faculty input, has been defined as the visionary vehicle for the school. It will, when given approval by the "share-holders," take a leadership role in the development of strategies designed to improve instruction, maximize student achievement, improve the school environment, and increase professionalism.



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